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James Meek

Would the IMF have ended the English civil war?

Comment, page 12

£500m blow in Blair's backyard

600 jobs to go as factory shuts

Peter Hetherington, Regional Affairs Correspondent

THE GLOBAL economic crisis will today land on Tony Blair's doorstep when a Japanese company announces the closure of the largest factory in his Sedgefield constituency, writing off a near-£500 million investment underpinned by government grants.

Six weeks after German electronics giant Siemens stunned ministers by abandoning a 15-month-old microchip plant on North Tyneside, with the loss of 1,000 jobs, the Fujitsu company is preparing to withdraw from a similar complex in Newton Aycliffe, 20 miles away.

As the Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Mandelson held crisis talks with Fujitsu — with sources suggesting that Tony Blair had earlier met the Japanese ambassador to press for a last-minute reprieve — anxious Labour MPs demanded a change of economic policy to protect ailing industrial areas.

Although ministers will today blame the worldwide glut in semi-conductors for the closure, several normally loyal MPs claimed the high pound was partly responsible. "There has to be a change of direction if unemployment is not to rise dramatically," said one.

Labour MPs from the industrial heartlands are incensed by recent comments from Gavyn Davies, the Goldman Sachs economic guru and friend of senior cabinet members, that job losses of up to 500,000 are a fact of life in the battle to keep the lid on inflation.

Last night, Fujitsu said that while it was aware of speculation, it had a duty to "advise and consult with employees and their representatives" and would make an announcement today. Almost 600 jobs could be lost.

Mr Mandelson, whose Hartlepool constituency borders Sedgefield and provides workers for Fujitsu, is said to be drawing up plans for a task-force to deal with the closure of the £500 million plant, which cost almost as much as the new Siemens complex.

A DTI spokesman said it would be inappropriate to comment before the company had time to consult its employees.

But a senior northern MP said many were resigned to closure, unless a deal could be arranged to save jobs with support from Mr Mandelson's industrial aid budget. Such assistance, running into tens of millions, played a key role in luring Fujitsu to County Durham and Siemens to North Tyneside. Pressure will now mount on them to repay grants, which could collectively approach £100 million.

The MP added: "This is a very big and impressive plant in Sedgefield, central to the North-east's restructuring after the closure of mines and shipyards and any closure would be a body blow. The Government has to take action urgently."

North-east MPs, particularly Derek Foster, have been urging the Government to change course and reduce interest rates — arguing that the strength of the pound is forcing thousands of job losses in companies like Fujitsu, dependent on exports.

The regional CBI has also voiced growing fears of large-scale redundancies — which have already involved the closure of a large crane-making firm and the threat of thousands of more job losses in industries from clothing to heavy engineering.

Like Siemens, Fujitsu was opened by the Queen in November, 1991. The plant reached profitability by 1993 and a year later it received a special award as the company's most successful factory worldwide. But like Siemens, much-vaunted expansion plans designed to more than double capacity were shelved.

On Monday, workers returned to Fujitsu after a 10-day closedown — ostensibly to re-equip the plant for a new product. In fact, sources indicated yesterday, the shutdown was to determine whether it would be worthwhile to re-equip in such an uncertain market.

Merger threat, page 15

'There is no President of the United States of America who has done more for peace in Northern Ireland than you'



President Clinton, applauded by Tony Blair, salutes the crowd after his keynote address to the Waterfront Hall, Belfast PHOTOGRAPH: ADAM BUTLER

He's still loved somewhere . . .



Clinton found the narrow spot between sombre and warm, and touched it directly. **Jonathan Freedland** reports from Omagh

HE had praised Northern Ireland for moving "from the deep freeze of despair to the warm sunlight of peace," and in the September afternoon in Omagh yesterday the president's description seemed about right.

A little more than two weeks ago, the people of Omagh were huddling under slate-grey skies, deluged by rain and drowned in grief — all under the telephoto eye of the world's media. Yesterday the cameras and notebooks were back, watching a different scene.

Now the sun was shining, and the nurses in their pressed white uniforms were not ferrying the injured or tending the dying — 28 in all — but crowding together to share a smile, a laugh and even the odd ice-cream. All of them waiting to catch a glimpse of the American president.

He made his entrance with the usual fanfare. Once again Omagh's High Street had been sealed off, not for the bomb squad but for the presidential motorcade.

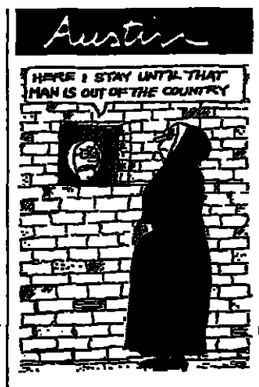
Eleven motorcycle outriders, a clutch of tinted-windowed trucks and then the sleek, dark Lincoln — almost absurdly large for Omagh's humble main road.

Bunched around it — their eyes scanning windows and roofs for snipers — the phalanx of men in dark glasses, talking into their sleeves. And at last, behind the bodyguards, the frosted-grey head of Bill Clinton, Tony Blair to one side, Cherie to the other. At the other end of the quartet, handily distant from her husband — the First Lady, Hillary Clinton.

The crowds let out a small cheer as the President started "working the ropeline," reaching out to touch someone.

The cameras started clicking, the eyes lighting up. "Bill, Bill," shouted those in the crowd who'd not yet felt the grasp of those huge, needy hands. Omagh seemed glad to enjoy an afternoon in the sun; after a long, long night of darkness it probably needed it.

"I think it helps people, it lets us know the world cares," said Mary McAneney, a midwife at Enniskillen hospital more used to the pains of birth than the screams of death she heard on August 15. She had waited nearly four hours behind the railings, waiting to shake Bill's hand. "I've never done that before for a famous person, I'm actually surprised I did it — but this has lifted our spirits."



So Bill Clinton, despite a dismal trip to Russia and never-ending trouble at home, has not compeletely lost his touch.

He sensed that Omagh needed a release, an excuse to smile after weeks of pent-up feeling.

Somehow he managed to find that narrow spot between sombre and warm, and touch it directly.

When he met bereaved relatives at the Omagh leisure centre, he sensed their need to look forward. "Life will never be the same here," he said, "but it will go on."

Nevertheless, the president did not have the perfect day he experienced on his first visit to Northern Ireland in November 1995, still recalled by White House officials as the best day of the Clinton presidency. The crowds then were huge and adoring, embracing the US leader more warmly than ever they had in America.

Yesterday it took a while for the president to hit the stride he eventually found in Omagh. In a morning speech at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast, his tone was oddly subdued. "It was like he was on autopilot," said Joan Hamilton, who had turned out to see the president three years ago.

"He was with us in body but not in spirit, there was no spark," agreed her friend Barbara Bigley. Both had noticed the empty seats in the hall and the thin crowds outside. Ms Hamilton reckoned it was more of a turnout for "a middle-ranking pop star" than an American president. She put it down to *Monica: Ulster people are moral people she said, and they disapprove of Bill's antics. Worse, they feel let down.*

The president could hardly escape the Lewinsky question, if only as innu-

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229 die as jet crashes

Nick Hopkins and Martin Kettle in Washington

SIX Britons were among the 229 people who died when a Swissair jet crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the Canadian coast at Nova Scotia, it emerged yesterday. The disaster, the worst in Swiss aviation history, claimed the lives of at least seven United Nations officials.

Victims on board flight SR 111 from New York to Geneva included staff from the refugee agency UNHCR and the children's fund, Unicef.

Jonathan Mann, a renowned expert on Aids who used to be in charge of the World Health Organisation's fight against the disease, also perished, along with his wife Mary-Lou Clements.

The precise cause of the crash was a mystery last night, but the evidence gathered by investigators pointed to an electrical failure which started a fire in the cockpit and led to devastating loss of control.

Debris was strewn over a four-mile stretch of water seven miles off the coast at Blandford, indicating that the plane nosedived as it struggled towards Halifax airport, where it had asked to make an emergency landing. The search operation was hampered by bad weather, but rescuers quickly realised that passengers could not have survived the initial impact.

A Swissair spokesman said the black box flight recorders on the wide-bodied jet, a three-engined McDonnell Douglas MD-11, had not been recovered yet. The airline yesterday ruled out a terrorist atrocity, and said it had no intention of withdrawing similar planes from its fleet.

Georges Schorderet, the chief financial officer of parent company SAirGroup, said the aircraft was overhauled in August and September last year, and had been *checked before takeoff. "This* airplane was in perfect working order," he said.

Most of the dead — 136 — were Americans but there were also 30 French, 28 Swiss, three each from Germany and Italy and two from Greece. The UN announced last night that 10 of its staff had been killed.

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Alarm over junior doctors' drug abuse

Sarah Boseley
Health Correspondent

THERE were calls for random dope testing in the medical profession yesterday as a report emerged showing that one in three male junior doctors uses cannabis and more than 10 per cent of both sexes take other drugs, from ecstasy to LSD and cocaine.

A study in this week's Lancet medical journal reveals that heavy drinking and the use of illicit drugs are common among young doctors in their early 20s. A survey of 90 house officers, one year after graduation from Newcastle university, reveals that of the 93 per cent who drank, 60 per cent exceeded the recommended safe limits. A quarter of men and a third of women indulged in "binge drinking" — consuming more than half the recommended limit (14 units for a woman and 21 for a man) in one session.

The doctors said they drank for pleasure, and three quarters claimed their drug use was also recreational. More than 35 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women used cannabis, more than 11 per cent using it weekly or monthly.

The other drugs, used by 13 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women, were hallucinogenic mushrooms, LSD, ecstasy, amyl nitrite, cocaine and amphetamines.

While Farhad Kamali from the Wolfson Unit of Clinical Pharmacology at Newcastle university and colleagues, the authors of the study, acknowledge that the drink and drugs pattern is not dissimilar to that of other people of the same age, they are concerned at the implications.

"The current drinking habits, illicit drug use and stress in some junior doctors are of concern, not only for their own well-being, but also how they may affect patient care," they write. They ask whether routine or random drug and alcohol screening should be introduced, pointing out that they exist in the army and some industries in the UK and among doctors in the United States.

Dr Kamali said he and his colleagues proposed to do further studies of older groups of doctors to see whether "once they mature and reach a position of responsibility they will curb their unhealthy lifestyles".

Mark Porter, an anaesthetist in Coventry who chairs the British Medical Association's Junior Doctors Committee, said he was sure the drinking and drug taking were no different from that of other young people. "In terms of marijuana use, I don't think there is anything to be worried about," he said. "The long-term effects are probably less dangerous than alcohol.

"We do know that the medical profession as a whole is more prone to alcoholism than the general population." The stress of the job was part of the reason. The study found the junior doctors were stressed and anxious.

On a rota to work one night in four, doctors often worked all night, then spent a night recovering, then crammed four nights' social life into two, Dr Porter said.

But Patrick Dixon, whose book The Truth About Drugs will be published on Monday, claims one doctor in 10 is dependent on either drink or drugs, and alleges that deaths and injuries result.

"If your mother has a hip replacement operation on a Monday morning and is admitted by two anaesthetists and a medical team of three, there is a 50 per cent risk that one of the five will be incompetent because of intoxication or withdrawing from intoxication.

"Research shows you are four times more likely to be involved in job-related accidents if you are on drink or drugs. The medical equivalent of that is slipping with the scalpel or prescribing the wrong dose. When we make mistakes, people get sick and if they are very sick, they die.

"If a doctor has a blood alcohol level that would make it illegal to drive a car, they should not be in an operating theatre."

He wanted to see random drink and drug testing in the NHS, he said, but the British Medical Association disagrees, arguing it would have major civil liberties implications. "We have not seen evidence that testing health professionals is necessary, or that it would be effective. If such a proposal were to be put forward, the BMA would want to consider it very carefully," it said in a statement.

GPs told to cut 15m antibiotics

Sarah Boseley

GENERAL practitioners were told yesterday to stop prescribing antibiotics for simple coughs, colds and sore throats, as part of a nationwide strategy to prevent what were once considered miracle drugs from losing their power to fight bacteria.

At least 15 million useless prescriptions for antibiotics are handed out by GPs every year for minor complaints caused by viruses, not bacteria. The Government is to launch campaigns to persuade GPs not to prescribe unnecessary antibiotics, and the public not to demand them.

The Government's Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, is writing to all doctors as a first step, urging them to take on the recommendations of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee (Smac) which reported yesterday.

Antibiotics have revolutionised medical care in the 20th century, but there are growing fears that they may become useless. There are now "superbugs" resistant to almost all drugs, which have mutated to first weak and then stronger forms of antibiotics. A conference in Copenhagen next week will be told that, if nothing is done, antibiotics will not work in 20 years' time, and drug-resistant bacteria will spread lethal diseases worldwide.

The report makes it plain that antibiotics are being over-used. An article in this week's British Medical Journal suggests that up to 75 per cent of antibiotic use in humans and animals "is of questionable therapeutic value".

There are 50 million antibiotic prescriptions a year, half of which are for sore throats. Diana Walford, director of the Public Health Laboratory Service, who chaired the subgroup which produced the Smac report, said that two-thirds to three-quarters of those infections were probably caused by viruses. Antibiotics are powerless against viral infections, which usually clear up on their own.

The health minister, Tessa Jowell, said at the launch of the report: "We are taking this issue extremely seriously. We see this as one of the major public health challenges. Antibiotics are one of the greatest medical innovations of the 20th century."

The report's recommendations would be followed by further strategies to address concerns that were raised earlier this year in a report from the House of Lords.

The report urges a campaign directed both at GPs, who prescribe 80 per cent of antibiotics, and the public. GPs should be told there are four things they can do to make a difference. These are: not prescribing antibiotics for coughs and colds; not prescribing them for viral sore throats; limiting prescribing for uncomplicated cystitis to three days; and only prescribing them on the telephone in exceptional cases.

Another campaign should educate patients not to expect antibiotics unless they are definitely needed, the report recommends.

But there is evidence that the Government will have its work cut out to change attitudes on both sides of the surgery door. Another paper in the British Medical Journal looks at GPs' and patients' attitudes to antibiotics for sore throats. Christopher Butler, of the Department of General Practice, University of Wales College of Medicine, and others found that "antibiotics are prescribed for a variety of complex reasons and their symbolic effect for the doctor-patient relationship should not be underestimated. Single, simple solutions are therefore unlikely to change prescribing habits."

The problem is a cultural one, they say. Although doctors know antibiotics are ineffective against sore throats, they prescribe them because the patient wants them, because they think the patient will get them from another doctor if they refuse, and because they feel it would take more time to explain why the patient should not be given them.

Later this year a further report, from the Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food, is likely to urge that antibiotics should no longer be used as growth promoters in animal husbandry.



President Clinton and his wife Hillary amid the bomb-hit shops in Omagh PHOTOGRAPH: J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE

Clinton: sombre but warm

continued from page 1

endo. Among the Omagh crowds, 15-year-old Andrina Kelly complimented Mr Clinton on his choice of tie — unaware of the trouble the presidential neckwear has caused recently. There were a few more titters when Mr Clinton praised the peacemakers in a speech: "I especially salute the women . . ."

But the occasional snigger won't bother the president too much. He got what he wanted from this trip: a message to the voters back home that he's still loved somewhere. In this task, he was generously assisted by the Prime Minister.

"There is no President of the United States of America who has done more for peace in Northern Ireland than you," he said. Mindful that Mr Clinton is anxious about his place in history, Mr Blair promised that when the peace of Ulster is chronicled, "your place within it is assured."

This visit was proof of that, catalysing a torrent of positive developments — yesterday Mr Blair even publicly addressed Gerry Adams by his first name. On balance a good day: Bill Clinton gained some much-needed public relations, Northern Ireland some progress, and Omagh the chance to smile.

Packing a political punch

Review

Tim Ashley

Maria Friedman
Royal Albert Hall

THIS year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of both Bertolt Brecht and his long-time collaborator Hanns Eisler. It's become fashionable, of late, to be critical of the pair of them.

Since the collapse of Communism, Brecht has increasingly been dismissed as a talented fraud, rather than a writer of genius. Eisler has always hovered uneasily in the shadow of Kurt Weill — still widely perceived as being "Brecht's composer", though their association was short-lived and Weill was frequently ambivalent about the collaboration.

The relationship between the three of them was explored in a late night Prom — part cabaret, part concert — in which Maria Friedman joined the BBC Singers, the excellent Matrix Ensemble and Robert Ziegler, for a programme in which Brecht's songs were interwoven with Eisler's orchestral and choral music. Though uneven, the evening packed a considerable punch.

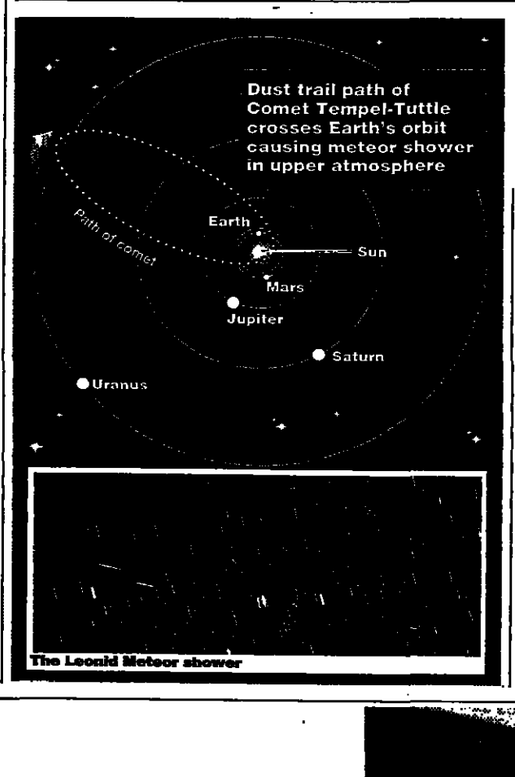
Friedman, best known for her Sondheim performances, has gravitated towards German political cabaret of late, and is proving a formidable interpreter. Fiercely committed to the ideology behind the music, she talks movingly to the audience about the depth of Brecht's compassion for the victims of fascism (rightly so, for we ignore his message at our peril).

She avoids any attempt at night-club camp, focusing attention purely on the songs and the lyrics which she projects in English with great emotional intensity. In Surabaya Johnny, she sounds calm and resigned until a terrifying sobbing intrudes in the final verse, catching you off balance.

During Eisler's harrowing To Those Born Later (written in 1937 at the nadir of both his and Brecht's lives), you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. Occasionally, however, an effect misfires. I could have done without the Cockney accent for the Kanonen Song and the all-purpose North-country twang for Pirate Jenny, though her routine during the latter — haranguing men in the stalls as capitalists, while the promenaders were identified with the revolutionaries — was chilling.

Ziegler, fabulous as always in the Weimar Republic repertoire, conducts with a ferocious punch, only losing his way a bit in the Kriegsfibel Bilder (War Primer Pictures).

Written in 1957 and setting a series of captions to photographs of wartime horror, they contain some of Brecht's most disturbing lyrics ("Now we thank God who told us to enlist . . . God is a fascist"). They weren't always projected with the necessary rage by the BBC2 Singers, while Ziegler's need to pause from time to time in order to accentuate the disparity between its brief movements led to the occasional *longueur*.



The Leonid Meteor shower

Earth heads for light fantastic

Comet dust promises celestial firework show of the decade

Tim Radford
Science Editor

ROCKET launches will be suspended, the Hubble space telescope will look away and satellites' solar panels will be moved out of the line of fire. The celestial firework show of the decade will light up the sky in November when the Earth runs head-on into the Leonids, and the skies will light up with a shower of shooting stars.

November 17 is scheduled for one of the more spectacular periodic encounters with a dust cloud from a comet.

Tiny fragments of stardust — the size of a grain of sand or rice — will hit the Earth's atmosphere at 41 miles a second, and burn up in a blaze of glory in the early morning sky, at the rate of at least one a second.

Meteor storms and showers are predictable — as with the Perseids last month. But every 33 years, a group called the Leonids provide a series of spectacular autumn encounters.

If this year is a disappointment, then pin your hopes on November 18, 1999, says Mark Littmann, professor of astronomy at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. "Back in 1966, they were estimated at as high as 40 meteors a second. This time around, a meteor a second would be very impressive. People who saw it in 1833 said it was like the heavens were on fire. It is like nothing else that can be seen in the night time sky."

People in the Far East will probably get the best show when the constellation Leo rises over the horizon after midnight. "Don't watch for just a minute or two, because it can come in spurts," he said.

The encounter is with a ribbon of dust shed by Comet Tempel-Tuttle. Meteors which burn up in the atmosphere and meteorites which hit the ground are a fact of life. Shooting stars appear every night. The guess is that Earth collects an average of 500 tons of stones, dust, water and gases from space every day.

"Over the 4 billion years the earth has been in existence," says Prof Littmann, "we have added 16 million million million tons, but even so we have added less than 1 per cent to the Earth's mass."

But the Leonids are the fastest arrivals of all, because the Earth runs into them almost head on. Humans are in no danger. But the radio region of the upper sky will fizz, crackle and pop, and instruments orbiting above the atmosphere will be at extra risk. Nasa engineers and satellite operators have been meeting to work out just how big that risk will be.

"Even though we are dealing with something the size of a grain of sand or smaller, travelling at 150,000 mph, it's like a bullet," said Prof Littman.

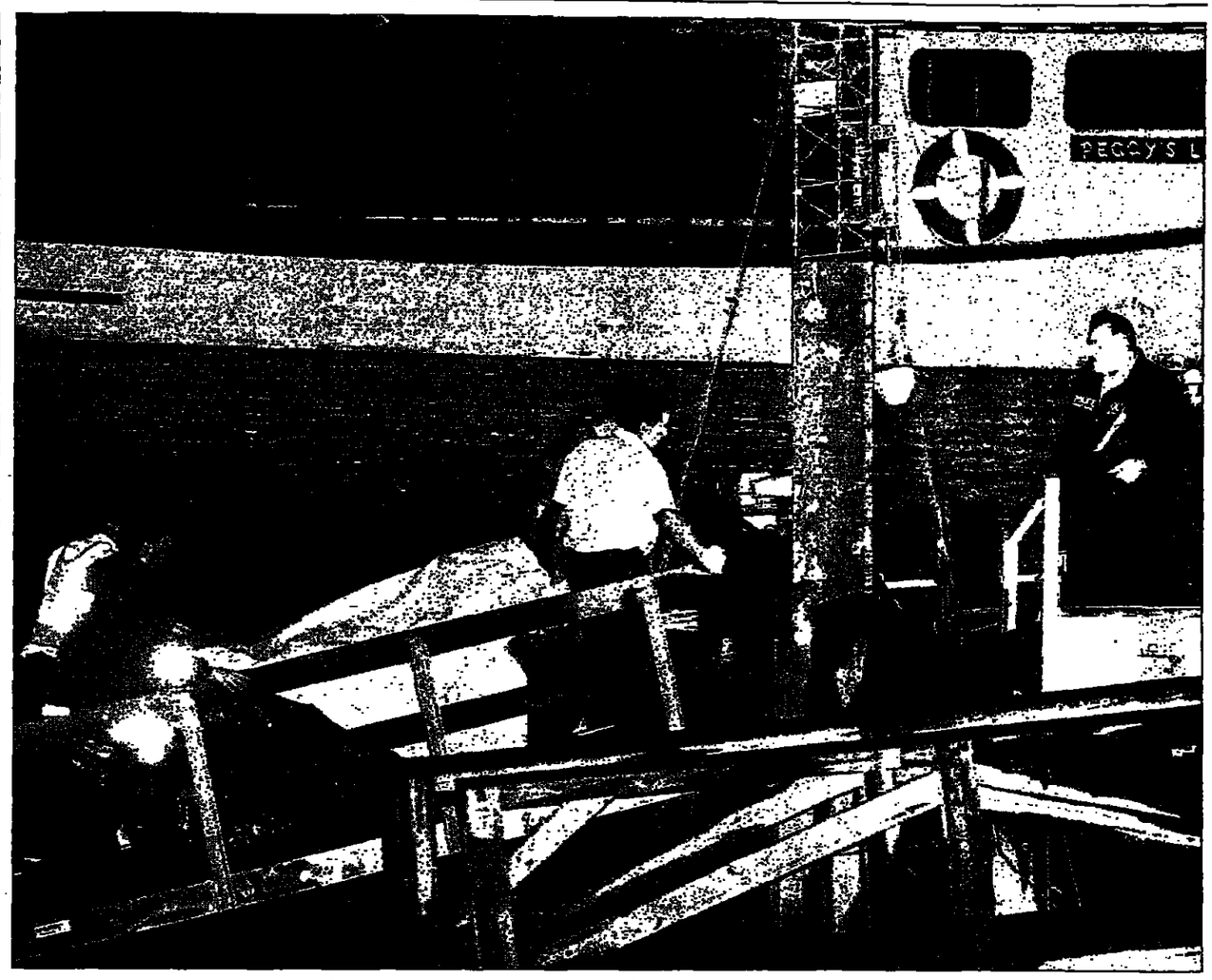
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Investigators search through recovered belongings and debris from the Swissair flight at a dock in Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia, yesterday, while emergency workers, right, carry away a body retrieved from the ocean PHOTOGRAPHS: TIM ROCHAN

Mystery of crash pilot's last message

The captain of Swissair flight 111 seems to have had no inkling of disaster. **Nick Hopkins** and **Martin Kettle** report

SEVEN minutes before Swissair flight 111 plunged into the sea, the voice of captain Urs Zimmerman crackled over the radio to air traffic control.

"Pan, Pan, Pan," he cried. "We have an emergency ..."

The call to the centre in Moncton, New Brunswick in Canada, was the last anyone heard from the McDonnell Douglas MD-11 jet, and it has perplexed investigators.

The Pan signal is less serious than a Mayday, and indicates that Mr Zimmerman recognised the aircraft was in difficulty, but not in jeopardy.

"This is odd. He was saying there was an emergency, but he was saying he had it under control," said David Learmont, the operations and safety editor of Flight Magazine in London. "If he'd called Mayday, he would have known a crash was imminent."

At some point in the next few minutes, somewhere over the ocean near Blandford, the aircraft went out of control and hurtled into the water. The question is, why?

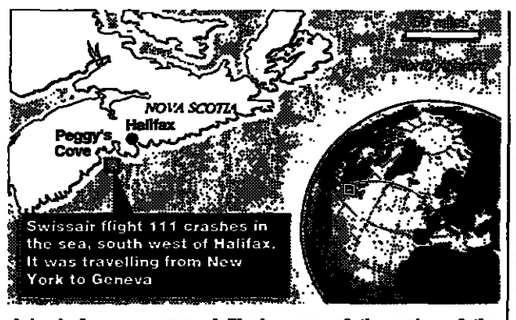
There was nothing unusual about the flight when it took off from John F Kennedy airport two hours before, at 8.18pm. Capt Zimmerman, one of Swissair's most experienced pilots and an MD-11 instructor, headed north on the familiar route taken by flights bound for Europe.

The first sign of trouble came an hour and a quarter later, 20 minutes before the crash, when Capt Zimmerman radioed that there was smoke in the cockpit. Although alarming, he said the flight was not in immediate danger and suggested heading to Boston's Logan airport.

Shortly afterwards he called air traffic control again. The situation had deteriorated and he needed to make an emergency landing at Halifax international airport.

The plane descended from its cruising altitude of 33,000 feet and the captain prepared to dump hundreds of tonnes of fuel into the ocean at St Margaret's Bay.

By this time the crew had ordered the passengers to put on their life-vests and explained the emergency drill in the event of a difficult landing. But there was no indication of crisis on board.



Swissair flight 111 crashes in the sea, south west of Halifax. It was travelling from New York to Geneva

"We think the plane had successfully dumped its fuel and was heading to the airport when it went down," said a Swissair spokesman. "The captain was following normal emergency procedure at this stage."

The situation, however, was about to become critical. Captain Zimmerman radioed a Pan emergency and Halifax prepared for the worst, sending all its fire engines on to the tarmac, and drafting in extra ambulances.

Flight 111 disappeared from radar screens as it descended between 10,000 and 8,000ft.

Residents in Blandford knew something was wrong, running out of their homes because of the noise of the low-flying plane. Edie Boyle said: "It sounded terrible. It was just droning."

"The motors were going, but it was the worst-sounding deep groan that I've ever heard," added Claudia Zinck-Gilroy.

Then they heard the crash. "It was like a clap of thunder," said Alberta Martin, of Peggy's Cove, a popular tourist destination. "There was a vibration and then everything was silent. You couldn't see flames or smoke or anything."

Locals put the point of impact as two miles off Ironbound Island.

Within the hour, scores of fisherman had put to sea on a cloudy night, joining the four planes and helicopters in the search for survivors. A Canadian navy ship, the HMSC Preserver, also steamed to the site, to no avail.

Rob Gordon, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reporter, joined the fishermen. "It was a little after 12.30 and it was clear from the atmosphere and the way people were dealing with it that they felt they might be able to find somebody," he said.

"But as time wore on it was obvious that they weren't going to find anybody alive. It was just calls for body bags, finding bodies and small bits of the plane. We were in the debris field, but there wasn't a whole lot out there."

Wreckage stretched over four square miles from Clam Island between Blandford, about 20 miles south-west of Halifax, to Peggy's Cove.

Mr Gordon said the scene was horrific — flares hanging over the water, illuminating bodies, pieces of bodies, torn life rafts, life jackets and bits of the plane.

Meanwhile, back at JFK, news of the disaster was filtering out.

Manuel Sager, deputy consul general for the Swiss consulate in New York, was the first official there, addressing a gaggle of relatives who had headed back to the airport after the first reports on CNN.

"There appears to be a tragedy unfolding off the coast of Nova Scotia," he told them.

Mark Tran on the chequered history of a relatively new airliner

THE crash of Swissair Flight 111 is by far the worst catastrophe suffered by a McDonnell Douglas MD-11 since the aircraft entered commercial service in 1990. By industry standards, it is a relatively new plane.

The MD-11 has been involved in over a dozen incidents worldwide, but nothing on the scale of the crash early yesterday. Two people died aboard a China Eastern Airlines MD-11 in April 1993, when it dropped 5,000 feet in seconds, pitching violently. The US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) blamed an "inadequately designed handle in the cockpit that was accidentally switched in the wrong position."

The three-engine MD-11 jet is a derivative of the DC-10 built by McDonnell, now owned by Boeing. The Seattle-based company said the crashed plane was delivered to Swissair in August 1991 and had completed more than 6,000 flights and 35,000 flight hours. There are about 180 MD-11s in service. The first major MD-11 accident occurred in August 1997, when a Federal Express cargo plane crashed and burned at Newark International Airport during landing. No lives were lost. Two pilots and three passengers crawled out of a cockpit window to safety after the plane flipped over.

More than half the previous incidents involved hard landings. Most were attributed to pilot error, but records also show that the plane had a tendency to pitch upward during landing.

In all, the NTSB has issued 30 recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration to resolve the problems blamed for the accidents.



A Swissair MD-11 of the type in yesterday's crash

Production of the MD-11 is being phased out by 2000 after McDonnell's takeover by Boeing because of a lack of orders. The MD-11 is popular with cargo firms such as Federal Express, but has not sold well as a passenger plane.

Stuart Matthews, head of the industry-sponsored Flight Safety Foundation, said Swissair's safety record was impeccable.

Airbus Industrie warned yesterday that the frequency of major aircraft accidents could double over the next 20 years to two every week.

Speaking in London, Adam Brown, vice president of Airbus Industrie's Forecasting and Strategic Planning Unit, blamed the increased departure rates.

US baseball fans wait open-mouthed for Big Mac

Martin Kettle in Washington

FORGET Bill Clinton's troubles. Forget Monica Lewinsky and Hurricane Bonnie. The United States has just one subject on its mind now — Big Mac.

Mark McGwire — Big Mac to fans and headline writers alike — stands on the threshhold of capturing the most sought after record in the national game. When the St Louis Cardinals' baseball star takes the field against the Cincinnati Reds tonight, he will require just three home runs to hoist his total for the season past Roger Maris's long-standing and iconic record of 61.

When he hits that 62nd homer — and the only question is when, not if, he will do it — Big Mac will instantly become the most prestigious US sportsman.

In his last game on Wednesday, against the Florida Marlins in Miami, McGwire blasted homers 58 and 59, the second night in succession he had added two to his mighty total. With three games against Cincinnati this weekend, expectation is mounting that the moment is nigh.

His pursuit of Maris's record has been the cliff-hanger of the 1998 baseball season, which began in early April and ends this month. The mighty McGwire, who admits to building up his strength by taking the androstenedine supplement, a steroid-like substance banned by the International Olympic Committee but allowed by baseball, is being chased all the way by Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs, who has 56 home runs.

Thirty-seven years ago, when Maris edged past his fellow New York Yankee Babe Ruth's 60 home run record, on the last day of the 1961 season, they said this would never be beaten. But today, with 23 more games still to go, McGwire is on the verge of putting the record even further out of sight.

What he is about to do is the equivalent of an English batsman beating Denis Compton's record 18 centuries in a cricket season, and it sparks the same mixed emotions between the generations.

For young fans, it has turned the quiet-spoken hitter into the nation's main sports hero. Thousands more fans turn up just to see McGwire practice than attend many games.

For the older generation, on the other hand, it was bad enough when Maris took the record from the legendary Ruth, let alone for McGwire to now claim it. Baseball purists tend to take a somewhat snooty view of home runs, saying that these explosive moments are not what the subtle game is really about.



Cardinals' star Mark McGwire is near a 62-homer record

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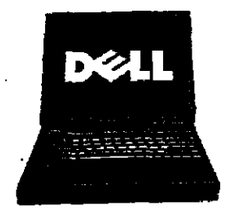
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Minister provokes outcry by admitting new baseline assessment could play a part in determining ability band of child starting school

Five-year-olds 'tagged as failures'

Rebecca Smithers
Education Correspondent

CHILDREN could be branded as failures only weeks after starting school if new "baseline assessments" are used in determining the ability of pupils as young as four or five, teaching unions warned yesterday.

The junior education minister, Charles Clarke, provoked a storm of protest when he admitted that the results of the new tests could play a "small" part in the "setting" of pupils: determining the ability band in which a child is placed.

Baseline assessment at the beginning of primary schooling starts this term for four and five-year-olds in England. The 20 minute test is designed to help teachers to plan each child's education by testing language, literacy and numeracy skills and personal and social development, and to maximise their progress.

Launching the programme, Mr Clarke said he was confident that the tests would help to start the "all-important dialogue" between home and school and that they would "benefit children throughout their school careers by identifying early on their particular strengths and weaknesses".

But he said: "Teachers should use all the evidence, of which this assessment will be a relatively small part, if they are going to go down the road of setting."

He added that he had "sympathy for more setting in primary schools" — placing children in groups of similar ability so they can be taught more effectively — and that it had a useful role to play.

Children will be tested on whether they can:

- Recognise and write the numbers one to 10
- Recognise letters by shape and sound
- Write and spell their own name
- Sit still without supervision for 10 minutes
- Make up their own story and tell it
- Recite most of at least one nursery rhyme
- Hold a book the right way up, and work towards the end of it, turning the pages one by one
- Read a simple text

Government sources later emphasised that although setting could be useful it was inappropriate in the first years of primary school and that "whole class teaching" remained the bedrock of primary school education. But they acknowledged that the literacy strategy — also due to be implemented from this term — envisaged teaching children, when appropriate, in small sets.

David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said Mr Clarke's comments were "a red herring" which undermined the very real value of the assessments.

"While setting may be useful prior to secondary school entry, I cannot think of any primary school which would set in the early years," Mr Hart said.

"Baseline assessments are an important tool, but the minister's comments will simply send out the wrong message to parents and encourage them to coach their children in order to avoid them being branded as failures at the age of four and five".

The Conservatives claimed that the Government was "in total disarray" over its education policy and called for a statement clarifying its position.

The party's schools spokeswoman, Theresa May, said: "The Government has proved it is in a mess over its policies on selection and setting, and it would be useful for parents and schools if David Blunkett [Education Secretary] sets the record straight."

Margaret Tulloch, speaking for the Campaign for State Education, said: "I don't believe teachers would want to set pupils at the age of five, but if that is the case then parents are bound to start coaching their children before they start school.

"They want them to do well, and if there are going to be sets for groups of different ability they won't want them turning up at age five and being put straight in the bottom set. That would be labelling them as failures right from the start."

Mr Clarke, once chief of staff to the former Labour leader Neil Kinnock and a former maths teacher, earlier warned that coaching children could be counter-productive, although parents should still help to prepare their children for school.



On the starting line . . . Will their ability be determined even before their first day of school? PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS THORPE

'Baseline assessments are an important tool, but the minister's comments will simply encourage parents to coach their children in order to avoid them being branded as failures at the age of four or five'

David Hart, heads' leader

Moon data show 3bn tons of water

Tim Radford
Science Editor

THE Moon may hold 10 times as much water as scientists at first thought. In March, an orbiting satellite, Nasa's Lunar Prospector, astonished the world by showing that, contrary to all expectation, lakes of frozen water have survived under the lunar dust away from the glare of the Sun.

The discovery immediately reawakened an old dream of human colonies on the Moon and raised the possibility of creating a filling station for exploration of deeper space. To take just a few extra pints of water to the Moon — adding to the weight carried — could put £100,000 on a rocket's fuel bill.

Apollo astronauts in the 1960s reported that the Moon was bone dry. But detectors on Nasa's Prospector satellite revealed up to 300 million tons of water, as ice and frost, in crater soils at the north and south poles. Now, after months of examining the data, US scientists have a higher figure. They report in the latest issue of the American journal Science that there could be 3 billion tons of water at each of the poles.

The water was probably delivered by comets crashing on the Moon over billions of years. Most would have evaporated. Some would have survived as ice, in the permanently shaded regions. The satellite's instruments detected hydrogen most likely present as water molecules.

"The data show clearly where the hydrogen is," said Bill Feldman of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. "It's localised in spots near the poles, and it has to be buried, about half a metre or so down."

Boy of six left at home by mother dialled 999

A SIX-year-old boy dialled 999 after being left home alone by his mother, Southwark crown court was told yesterday.

The boy, who cannot be named, told police he had been locked in the Kensington, London, flat he shared with his mother.

Officers found him peering through the letterbox, the court was told.

The mother, aged 30, denied cruelty to a child. Mark Wyeth, prosecuting, told the jury she had left him at about 6.30pm on April 1. Just after 7.40 he dialled 999.

Police who went to the flat found the boy looking through the letterbox. He said: "I'm scared and my mummy has locked me in."

The officers waited with the boy until 9pm, then took him to Kensington police station, leaving a note for his mother. She arrived at 9.45 and took him home. She was arrested and interviewed the next day.

The case continues today.

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The Observer
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Twins speak ... Charlie Hooker's orb sculpture, named Twins, entertains Brighton's Churchill Square shoppers with street sounds emitted as musical tones PHOTOGRAPH: ROGER BAMBER

McDonald to front ITV's hour-long news show

Helen Carter

ITV sought to deflect criticism of its plans to move News at Ten yesterday when it announced that Trevor McDonald will anchor a new hour-long current affairs programme.

The programme, which is almost certain to replace World in Action, will be made by Granada and ITN, who beat off a challenge from Carlton for the £8 million contract.

ITV managers hope the announcement will head off attacks from politicians who have complained that plans to move News at Ten to 6.30pm mean that ITV is not taking its commitment to news seriously.

The new hour-long programme, which it is hoped will emulate the success of America's 60-minute news shows, will go on air at 10pm once a week if the Independent Television Commission gives ITV the go-ahead to move News at Ten.

The as-yet untitled programme will be edited by Jeff Anderson, brother of ITV's controller of news and current affairs, Steve Anderson, who was among the ITV executives who made the decision that Granada should win the bid.

Last night Steve Anderson dismissed claims that his brother had an unfair advantage. "We have gone for Granada because theirs was the strongest bid in terms of programme quality, strength and depth," he said.

"In Jeff's defence, he is a considerable player in TV current affairs, and this will be the fourth time he has been an editor of a network programme. He is actually a very talented and formidable player who is supported by the infrastructure."

Along with Granada and Carlton, four other companies had bid for the contract: Twenty Twenty Television, United Productions with Mentorn Barraclough Carey, Yorkshire Television and Scottish Television Enterprises.

Although Mr Anderson said it was premature to discuss the future of World in Action, he conceded it was possible that the new programme would replace it. But he said ITV had been impressed by its recent ground-breaking programmes on Viagra and drunken air passengers, and ratings had improved.

He said that while McDonald would be the new programme's main anchor, there would be the flexibility to use other presenters. Its transmission would begin sometime next year, and the Granada contract would run for two years.

A spokesman for Carlton said: "Steve Anderson has written to us and said that they considered ours an exceptional bid but Granada's was stronger. I do not think it came as a surprise, as anybody involved in the second round of the process would realise that it was going to be a very close decision."

ITV's director of programmes, David Liddiment, said: "With this commission, ITV has once again demonstrated its commitment to quality factual programming."

● Sue MacGregor, presenter of Radio 4's Today programme, yesterday said BBC journalists were forced to hold editorial conferences in private so rival programme makers could not overhear.

She complained that journalists had been forced to abandon in early July the "shabby comforts" of Broadcasting House for the "goldfish bowl" of White City.

Writing in the New Statesman, the normally mild-mannered presenter said the move had been "dreamt up by people who don't make programmes". "The idea is that we all work together and pool ideas. But ... people who do [make programmes] prefer to work in little huddles.

"We don't take kindly to sharing our strategy with our rivals. So our planning meetings are now held in the tiny glassed-off areas available to us away from prying ears, and conversations about contacts and programme guests are conducted in hushed tones."

She said Today presenters could no longer burst out of the confines of the studio, loudly and libellously discussing the previous three hours of broadcasting.

Leading comment, page 13

Change of heart over baby

Woman paralysed in skydiving accident wins right to keep child



Penny Roberts after the decision by social services yesterday

Martin Wainwright

A PREGNANT woman who lost the use of her legs and hands after a 14,000ft skydiving fall, is to be allowed to keep her baby following a change of heart by social services.

Penny Roberts, aged 35, who became pregnant two years after the accident during a holiday in Florida, emerged from a case conference in Bradford yesterday wan but triumphant.

Neighbours in the West Yorkshire village of Steeton had threatened to form a human barricade round her house, where they have helped her gradual recovery, if any attempt was made to take her child into care.

Ms Roberts, who is expecting the baby next month, said: "I'm just really pleased at this decision, and that's all I've got to say now.

"I just want to go home and have a rest."

Social workers had expressed concern that Ms Roberts, who has had 24-hour care since her accident, would be unable to bring up the child properly.

Bradford council has denied it was concerned about the cost, but said there were worries about the practical implications of looking after both mother and child on a round-the-clock basis for a prolonged period.

The case was further complicated by an acrimonious split between Ms Roberts, who lives in a specially converted bungalow, and the baby's father, Andrew Mitchell, 34, who had proposed to her after reading about her accident.

The couple split up shortly after she became pregnant. Both had thought her injuries would rule out conception.

Mr Mitchell, a former soldier, bodyguard and yacht crewman from Portsmouth, said last night he was pleased with the decision but would press for regular access to his child.

Ms Roberts, who has said that she does not want anything more to do with Mr Mitchell, said before the meeting that she was entirely confident about motherhood.

"All I've asked for is assistance. I can look after my own baby."

Mike Stow, assistant director of social services for Bradford, said after the meeting that careful discussions and widespread consultation had led to a detailed plan to help Ms Roberts look after the child at home. Friends and neighbours had been consulted and an expert opinion obtained from a child psychiatrist at St George's hospital in London.

"This has never been an issue of cost but of a genuine desire to provide the best possible upbringing for this child," Mr Stow said.

"That is why we have not allowed anyone to rush us into a decision before every aspect of this case was professionally considered."

He added: "I am sure that with her level of commitment and determination, she will more than meet the challenge."

Ms Roberts had been preparing to go to the High Court if the decision had gone against her, triggering a test case.

She said before the meeting that she had received indications as early as the 14th week of pregnancy that social services might think it better for the child to be taken into care.

Release of lost Lennon recordings, with a little help from Yoko and Sean

Helen Carter

FANS of John Lennon can look forward to the release of 100 previously unheard solo tracks by the former Beatle.

The recordings were locked away for 18 years in the offices of Capitol Records in the United States following the singer's death in 1980.

They will be on sale from November in a four CD set, to be distributed in Britain by Parlophone Records and likely to be called The John Lennon Anthology.

Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono, acted as executive producer for the set and their son, Sean, now himself a musician, also had what is described as a "creative input".

Release of the set is reported by the US music magazine Billboard, which describes it as "one of the greatest finds in music history".

In Liverpool, a Beatles tour guide, Phil Cappell, said it was a major musical event. "The fact that there are unreleased Lennon tracks coming out is bound to please a lot of fans.

"There is definitely a market for this." However, on a note of caution, he added: "I just hope it isn't studio demos and that the quality is good enough."



John Lennon after the Beatles' break-up. Bootleg copies of the tapes, broadcast on US radio, change hands for £20

Stephen Bailey, manager of the Beatles Shop in Liverpool, said: "I have been working here for 16 years listening to the same songs over and over again. For me, it will be good to listen to something new.

"A lot of John's solo acoustic demos have a great feel about them, which they have later lost in production. They deserve to be released and heard."

Mr Bailey said many fans would have already heard some of the tracks, which were broadcast eight years ago on a US radio show.

Bootleg copies of the Lost Lennon Tapes change hands among fans for £20, with an original recording of the radio show fetching as much as £4,500.

"Ever since the Lost Lennon series ran in America, we have had people in the shop asking where they can get hold of copies of the songs," said Mr Bailey. "That gives us a clear indication that there is still tremendous demand for his work. An awful lot of fans will buy this anthology for Christmas."

Three years ago, one of Lennon's home recordings, Free As A Bird, reached number two in the UK singles charts.

The unfinished work was completed by the three surviving Beatles, who collaborated for the first time since 1970.

A spokeswoman for Parlophone said that no date had been fixed for the CD set's launch, and said the firm was unable to comment on the content of the tracks.

● A solo album by the late Linda McCartney is to be released next month, called Wide Prairie.

The album includes all the songs she recorded privately over the past 20 years, and was produced by her husband Paul, the former Beatle.



Catwalk model quits, jaded by waif worship

Amelia Gentleman

THE fashion industry's obsession with abnormally slender physiques has come under fire again, this time from within.

Teenage model Sarah Thomas has announced her decision to quit the catwalk in Paris, New York and Milan this year because she can no longer tolerate the fashion world's compulsive worship of the skinny form.

These views, from someone who has witnessed the industry's flaws first hand, have fuelled the long running criticism of a business that promotes unattainable and unhealthy ideals as the norm.

Described as one of Britain's modelling success stories, Ms Thomas, aged 18, already feels jaded by the international fashion world and is rejecting the chance to earn up to £6,500 a day in the next autumn shows because of the "ghastly cattle market". She said: "I had begun to dislike putting up with the pressure to be thin. People want you to be skinnier all the time."

The model, now the "face" of the cosmetics company Cover Girl, began working at the age of 14 when Eileen Ford, an agent, took her on, saying: "If that girl does not make a million dollars in the next year, I'll eat my hat."

The attraction of the lifestyle quickly faded. She said yesterday: "You stand in a queue of hundreds of girls. Then somebody takes one look at your portfolio, closes it, hands it back, says 'No thanks' and doesn't even look up to say 'Hello'. It is so impersonal. It's all a bit sleazy."

Models who do not make the grade are treated with contempt. Ms Thomas, who at 5ft 10in weighs a healthy nine stone, said: "I remember trying things on a couple of times which were a bit tight around the hips and someone slapped my hips. That is hard to take. It is incredibly rude."

She said the drink, drug and eating problems of other models horrified her. "You see so many horrible things backstage. There are very young girls under 16, some on their own. Some can handle themselves, but I know what I was like at that age and it drives me mad not being able to do anything about it."

Her comments echo those of model Emma Balfour who said earlier this year that she was leaving the catwalk, disgusted at the drug abuse and anorexia among colleagues.

Tim Newton, spokesman for the Eating Disorders Association, welcomed Ms Thomas's comments. "The point she is making is not just about the pressure to be thin, she is also complaining about being treated merely as a body and that's very much a factor with eating disorders."

In 1996, the fashion world briefly seemed to relax its outlook when size 16 model Sophie Dahl became famous, but two years on she remains an exception in a world dominated by matchstick waifs.



Sarah Thomas . . . turning away from fashion's 'cattle market' PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS MOORE

Special deals for 'Chianti louts' in airline price war

£17 for one-way flight to Europe

David Gow

RYANAIR yesterday ratcheted up the low fares war by offering one-way flights to Europe for £16.99, a price which includes the £10 UK airport tax.

The Dublin-based airline is making 1 million seats available for what Mike O'Leary, its chief executive, calls "Chianti louts" on its 26 European routes between September 22 and December 16.

This latest battle among low-cost airlines is aimed at undercutting British Airways, which had planned to launch a new round of price-cuts or "world offers" yesterday. BA, which has its own low-cost carrier, Go, is understood to have pulled advertising at the last minute because of the Swissair crash. It thought launching a fresh price war yesterday would be "inappropriate" but plans to go ahead this weekend.

Undaunted, Mr O'Leary yesterday chose a City of London wine bar near a BA shop to announce that booking for Ryanair's seat sale would last 12 days from yesterday — in contrast to the bigger carrier's recent 36-hour booking offer over a weekend.

The cheapest one-way flights, including UK tax, will be from Luton and Liverpool to Dublin, and from Stansted to St Etienne in France, Rimini in Italy, and Kristianstad in Sweden. Return fares to those three European cities will be £33.98, plus the local tax on the return flight.



Return flights from Stansted to Pisa, Venice, Oslo, Carcassonne and Stockholm will cost £59.98 plus local taxes. Return travel on all routes on Friday, Saturday and Sunday will cost £20 extra. This compares with BA's recent offer of return flights from London to Paris of £69, to Scotland, £59, to Pisa, £99, and to Bermuda, £199.

A BA spokesman said of the Ryanair campaign: "We have always maintained that competition is healthy and ultimately the consumer is the winner. We have recently had a highly successful seat sale to over 80 destinations worldwide and will continue to introduce genuine low-fare deals for travellers."

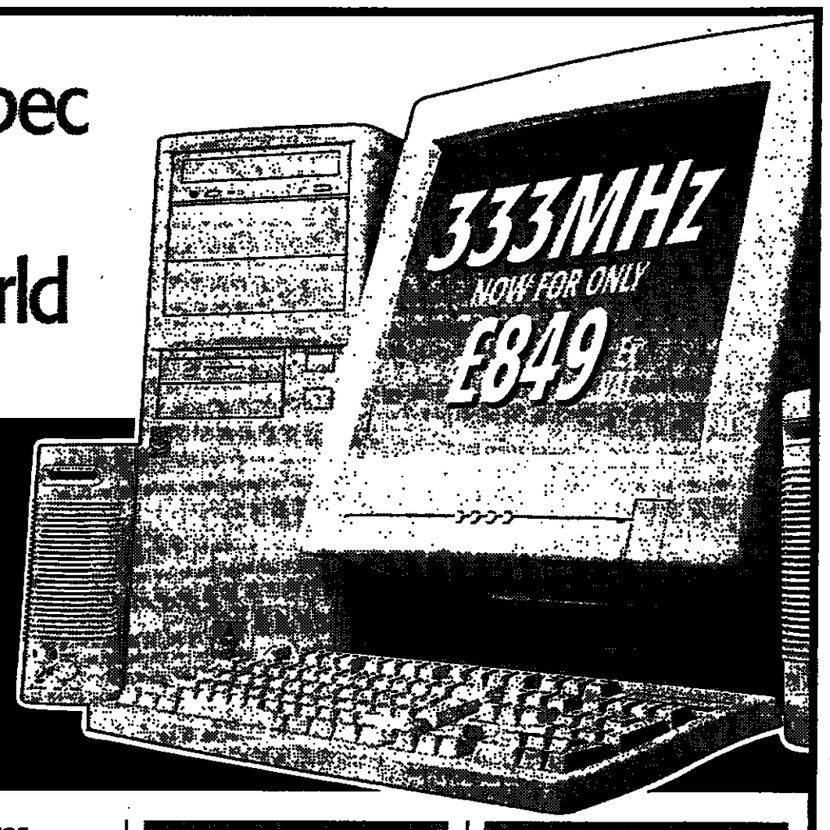
Mr O'Leary dismissed BA's low-cost offers as a non event, and insisted his airline had smashed its monopoly on routes by offering typical return flights at £129 compared with the bigger carrier's £547.

He claimed to have boosted air traffic to Sweden by 20 per cent, winning a 25 per cent market share, and to have filled 80 per cent of seats on European flights in the summer when rivals claimed to have been hit by the World Cup. He also expected to carry 5 million passengers this year compared with Go's 400,000.

But his offer came with a sting in the tail. "The market for low fares is absolutely booming. But there's only one which is making substantial profits [us], and the challenge is who will survive.

"Clearly, we will — but we are not too sure about everybody else."

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Kissing 'raises meningitis risk'

KISSING is one of the chief ways of passing on the dangerous form of meningitis, new research has disclosed.

A Norwegian study, reported in the British Medical Journal, showed that members of a meningitis patient's household and "kissing contacts" had a greatly increased risk of carrying the disease.

Contacts outside these two groups were much less likely to be carriers, although the risk for them was still two to three times that of the general population.

The aim of the research was to see which groups of people in contact with meningitis patients ought to have preventive antibiotic drug treatment. Widespread use of these drugs has led to the emergence of virulent and resistant strains of bacterial meningitis.

Bjorn-Erik Kristiansen, of the University of Tromso, and colleagues studied the prevalence of dangerous meningitis bacteria strains in 1,535 primary contacts of 48 patients with the disease.

The research showed that members of a patient's household and kissing contacts had a 12.4 per cent risk of carrying meningitis, compared with a risk of less then 2 per cent for those in less close contact.

DNA fingerprinting was used to identify the harmful strains of the bacterium Neisseria meningitidis.

Before 1970, antibiotics were liberally handed out in Norway during meningitis outbreaks to prevent the disease from spreading. But the authorities abandoned the practice when a virulent clone of the organism resistant to the drug emerged.

The researchers said: "When meningococcal disease occurs, often carriers of the pathogenic strain of Neisseria meningitidis can be found in the patient's contacts.

"These carriers may develop the disease, or the bacterium may spread from person to person eventually causing disease in someone without apparent link with the first patient."

They concluded that giving household members and kissing contacts antibiotics seemed "well justified", but the benefits of treating individuals outside these groups appeared to be marginal.

Goalkeeper stops thief after chase

Jamie Wilson

SHEFFIELD Wednesday goalkeeper Kevin Pressman yesterday caught a thief who tried to steal his wife's Mercedes after chasing him along roads and through fields for more than an hour.

The footballer cornered the man in a field before police made an arrest.

The drama began at 6.15am when Pressman, aged 30, was woken by the sound of the £50,000 Mercedes Benz being started.

"I looked out of the bedroom window and saw the car driving off down the road," he said. "I quickly phoned the police, got dressed and then set off in my own car on the off-chance that I would see the thief."

Pressman spotted the Mercedes in the middle of the road, five miles from his home in Chesterfield, north Derbyshire.

"I thought the car had been abandoned because I couldn't see the driver. But when I tried the door, the thief, who had been crouching down trying to start the radio, popped up again and shot off. I got back in my car and followed him."

Pressman gave the police a running commentary on his mobile phone, and eventually a patrol car appeared.

"I basically left them to it at this point and decided to go home, but as I went back I saw the Mercedes in a ditch. The lad had evaded the police and had smashed into another car on a country lane."

The man got out of the car and ran off — with the goalkeeper in hot pursuit across fields. "I was on his tail all the way and there was no way he was going to out-run me," he said.

A spokesman for Derbyshire police praised the keeper saying that without his intervention there would have been little chance of an arrest.

"He showed real bravery and presence of mind, and he did very well in the circumstances."

The car was written off.

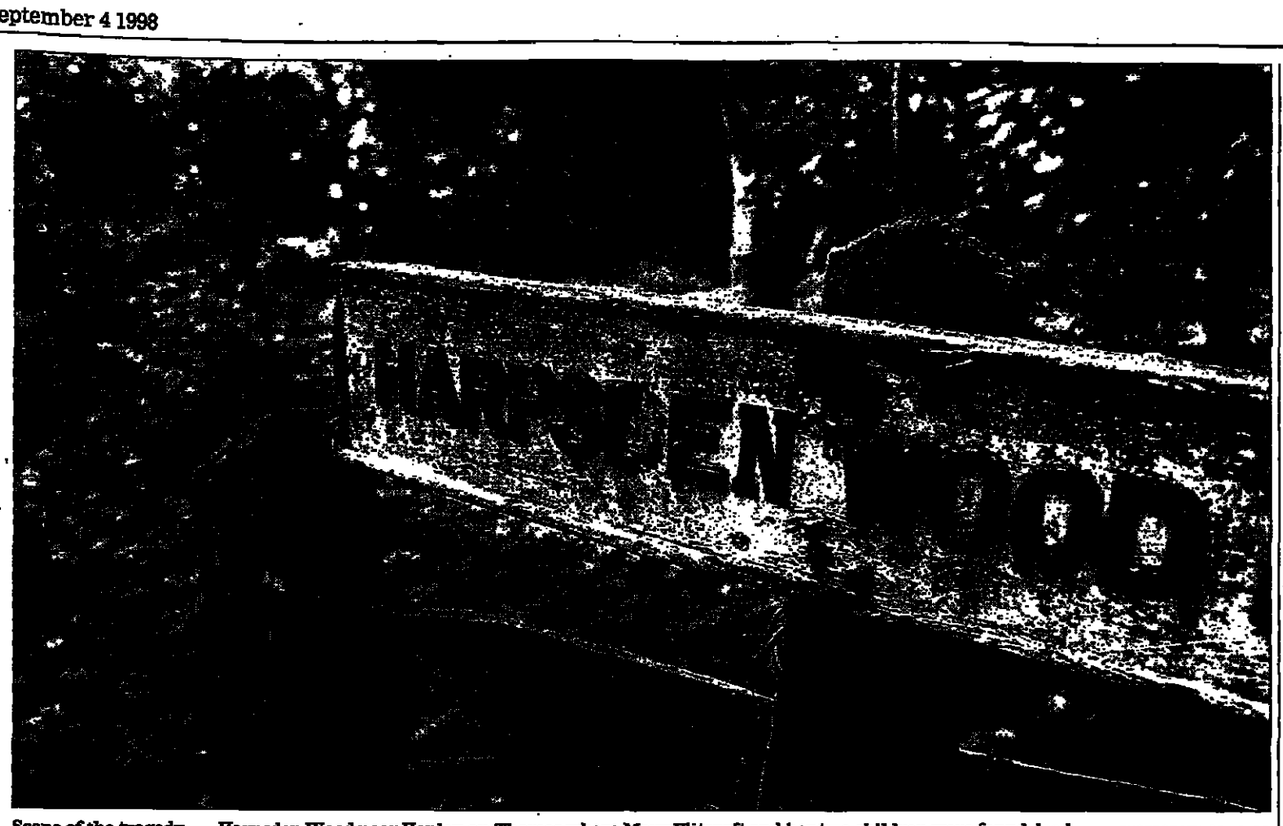
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'I thought perhaps Mary had had a car crash because you can understand something like that, but this, with the two little children involved, is so hard to comprehend'



Scene of the tragedy . . . Harpsden Wood near Henley-on-Thames where Mary Flitcroft and her two children were found dead PHOTOGRAPH: BEN GURR

Mother and two children gassed in car

Walker finds car in woods with pipe leading from the exhaust

Rory Carroll

A WOMAN gassed herself and her two children in the family car hours before their first day back at school after a row with her husband, detectives said yesterday.

Mary Flitcroft drove her daughter, Hannah, seven, and her son, Michael, five, from their home in Woodley, Reading, to a woodland area 10 miles away near Henley-on-Thames, before attaching a hosepipe to the exhaust.

A walker found the bodies yesterday morning at Harpsden Woods. Police confirmed they were treating the deaths as a double murder and suicide.

A Home Office pathologist was expected yesterday to start a post mortem examination.

The car was discovered several hours after Mrs Flitcroft, aged 35, who was separated from her husband, Leslie, had set off from their home.

The children were pupils at Rivermead county primary school in Woodley, Berkshire.

"Everyone is devastated. I just felt extreme sadness when I heard," neighbour William Brooks, aged 68, said. "I thought perhaps Mary had had a car crash because you can understand something like that, but this, with the two little children involved, is so hard to comprehend.

"I know that she and her husband were separated and that he had left home, and she had suffered from depression for quite some time."

Detective Inspector Ian Pusey, who is heading the investigation, said the couple had been living apart for several months.

Officers were not looking for anyone else in connection with the deaths.

He said Mr Flitcroft was at the police station and was distraught.

"We have no idea yet why she did this. It is bizarre and one of the most tragic incidents I have had to deal with.

"We believe she drove out to the woods in the early hours of the morning. The kids were in their nightclothes and had sleeping bags with them. There were numerous suicide notes left in the car addressed to different members of the family."

Another neighbour, a 29-year-old mother who asked not to be named, said: "My daughter, who is four, used to go and play in their driveway with their two children.

"Their kids always looked happy when they were playing out at the front of the house."

She added: "My daughter got on very well with them, but because she is only four, hopefully she will be too young to realise what's going on."

Many neighbours gathered in the street or sat on garden walls, hardly talking, as they tried to take on board what has happened.

It was understood that Michael was due to have started his first day at school yesterday.

Friends of the family said the excited youngster had been looking forward to joining the reception class at the Rivermead primary school.

Dog walkers often parked their cars at the site of the tragedy at Harpsden Wood so most villagers had not been surprised to see the silver grey vehicle parked on the track.

One villager saw it on her way to work. "It looked as if it had hit a tree. I thought 'oh dear, someone has had an accident'."

Trimble tells Sinn Fein power can be shared

John Mullin
Ireland Correspondent

DAVID TRIMBLE, Northern Ireland's First Minister, yesterday addressed Sinn Fein directly for the first time, signalling that, after a tumultuous week of political developments, he was close to sitting in the proposed power-sharing executive with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

Mr Trimble's carefully crafted speech, which boosted hopes of an unprecedented bilateral meeting, was later given a guarded welcome by Mr Adams, who said that dialogue was the key to progress.

The move came as President Clinton underscored the accelerating drive for peace with his second visit in three years.

At a rally of 2,000 invited guests in Belfast, Mr Clinton praised Mr Adams for his declaration this week that the republican terrorist war was effectively over. But he made it clear that decommissioning of weapons had to follow.

His speech praised the people of Northern Ireland and their politicians for coming so far so quickly. He assured them that that much more was possible as long as their courage held.

Mr Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionists, stared across at Mr Adams, sitting in the front row of Belfast's Waterfront Hall, on several occasions during his welcome to Mr Clinton. It was something he has never done previously.

His tough plea for decommissioning came with an olive branch, suggesting that he was paving the way for Sinn Fein take up its two places in the 12-member executive. His approach was apparently designed to prepare his own party for that move.

Mr Trimble said: "Once we can speak in freedom, once we are agreed our only weapons will be our words, then there is nothing that cannot be said; there is nothing that cannot be achieved . . .

"I say to those who are crossing the bridge from terror to democracy: every move you make towards peace, I welcome. Every pledge you make to peace, I will hold you to it. As First Minister, I will work with anyone who has the interests of peace at heart."

Jeffrey Donaldson, as Ulster Unionist MP who opposed the Good Friday Agreement, gave Mr Trimble's speech a guarded welcome, but other hardline party members were unhappy. One hinted at a split if Mr Trimble allows Sinn Fein into government without prior IRA decommissioning.

In other developments which indicate that the momentum towards agreement on the executive is gathering pace, on Wednesday Mr McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, met John de Chastelain, who heads the International Commission on Decommissioning. General de Chastelain described it as "highly satisfactory".

'Once we are agreed our only weapons will be our words, then there is nothing that cannot be said; there is nothing that cannot be achieved'

Provisional IRA members have also visited the homes of members of the Real IRA and its political ally, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, giving them two weeks to wind up.

Members of the political group claimed some had been told they would be shot if they did not.

One man said: "Two men called at my door and said the Real IRA had no right to exist and accused it of misappropriating weapons.

"At other houses, Sovereignty members were told they had no right to speak against the peace process.

"Some were simply warned action would be taken against them if they did not make amends within a fortnight . . . others were informed they would be shot."

Heads criticise plan for law against sex with pupils

John Carvel
Education Editor

HEAD teachers last night urged the Government to abandon proposals for a new criminal offence to punish school staff having affairs with pupils aged 16 to 17.

Ministers were planning a bill in the autumn to lower the homosexual age of consent to 16. To overcome opposition in the House of Lords they were considering strengthening protection for young people of both sexes against predatory advances from adults in positions of trust.

But the National Association of Head Teachers warned last night that any attempt to criminalise consensual relationships between teachers and pupils would make it more difficult to stamp out impropriety through disciplinary procedures.

David Hart, its general secretary, said youngsters would be better protected by professional codes of conduct and strong action by employers than laws against sexual behaviour that would be difficult to define.

"Improper relationships between members of staff and female students are almost always so treated, notwithstanding the fact that the age of consent for girls is 16. Equalising the age of consent for boys should make no difference," he said.

It would be extremely difficult to define the sort of relationship that might constitute a criminal breach of trust. Too narrow a definition, limiting it to intercourse, buggery and gross indecency, might prevent employers from taking action against behaviour they considered inappropriate, but which did not fall within the scope of the law.

Too broad a definition could be draconian and risk criminalising consensual behaviour that did not warrant such drastic action. Particular problems could arise if children had been involved in a relationship with an adult before they found themselves in a pupil/teacher situation.

Mr Hart said a general teaching council was being set up with powers to discipline teachers guilty of unacceptable conduct. Sexual impropriety should be covered by its code of standards, due to come into force in 2000.

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News in brief

Three die as car collides with coach

THREE people died and four others, including a baby, were taken to hospital yesterday when a car collided with a coach on the A12 at Hopton, near Great Yarmouth. A Norfolk ambulance service spokesman said: "All three passengers in the car died."

The coach, carrying five people, overturned. At least four of its occupants, including the baby, were taken by ambulance to the James Paget hospital in Great Yarmouth.

Norfolk police said the south-bound carriageway of the A12 was blocked. Norfolk fire brigade used hydraulic cutting equipment to release some of the victims.

Murder accused extradited

A MAN who was extradited from Holland appeared at the non-jury special criminal court in Dublin yesterday evening charged with the murder of investigative journalist Veronica Guerin.

Brian Meehan, 33, was flown back from Holland yesterday after he lost a 10-month legal battle against extradition.

During the Dutch legal proceedings it was claimed that Meehan was the driver of a motorbike whose pillion passenger shot Ms Guerin, 36, six times on June 26, 1996. Meehan faced 18 charges — including the murder of Ms Guerin and various drugs and guns charges. He was remanded in custody until October 8.

Another Dublin man, Paul Ward, 34, is due to go on trial on October 6 accused of the murder of Ms Guerin, while John Gilligan, 47, is in prison in England fighting extradition to Ireland on a charge of murdering Ms Guerin.

City apologises for abuse

SHEFFIELD city council apologised yesterday after a report said sexual and physical abuse at a centre for adults with learning difficulties went unnoticed for 14 years. The offences allegedly took place at the now-closed Woodfold Day Centre from 1981-95. Allegations against staff included rape, neglect, and assault.

Penny Thompson, executive director of social services, said: "This is a very embarrassing situation for the council and we have apologised to the people involved."

South Yorkshire police said the Crown Prosecution Service had decided against prosecution.

Staff quit NHS

MORALE among health service workers is at an all-time low, says a survey published today. Only one in 10 NHS professionals think they will still be in the service in three years' time — and just 4 per cent saw a permanent future in the NHS.

Physiotherapists, radiographers, chiropodists and dieticians who have qualified during the past five years cited low pay, poor promotion prospects and stress as the main reasons for dissatisfaction, the survey of 1,800 members of Professions Allied to Medicine disclosed.

Joce Prudence, spokeswoman for PAMs, said: "These figures show there will be an exodus of highly qualified staff from the NHS in the next three years unless urgent action is taken."

Palace party for football stars

THE Queen has invited the England and Scotland World Cup squads, including coaching staff and officials, and the British-based Jamaica players, to a Buckingham Palace reception on October 29.

Wives and partners are not expected to attend — so there will be no pregnant Posh Spice, Victoria Adams, at the party on the arm of Manchester United's David Beckham.

Hurricane ends summer

BRITAIN may have enjoyed the last of the summer sun as torrential rain hits many parts with more wet weather predicted for the weekend. Remnants of hurricane Bonnie, which caused violent storms in the USA, are believed to be contributing to the wet spell. Torrential rain and strong winds could hit the north and west on Sunday, with heavy showers in many parts of the country, says the PA WeatherCentre.



The charge of the 21st Lancers at the Battle of Omdurman. Victory was a triumph of discipline and firepower over fanatical courage PHOTOGRAPH: NATIONAL MUSEUMS and GALLERIES ON MERSEY

FO scoffs at demand for Kitchener apology

A Sudanese MP wants one of Britain's most revered heroes to be classed as a war criminal because of a battle 100 years ago. **Ian Black** reports



'There is no cause for such a charge against Kitchener. He fully implemented British policy. He did it at minimal risk to the Egyptian and British lives under his command and in a fully professional and methodical manner'

Historian Edward Spiers

BRITAIN has no plans to apologise to Sudan for Lord Kitchener's behaviour at the end of the 19th century — a demand Khartoum may be planning to lump together with one from Washington for its more recent military action.

Foreign Office officials yesterday scoffed at reports that a Sudanese MP, Mohammed Daoud al-Khalifa, grandson of the Khalifa whose rebellion was crushed by Kitchener's victory at Omdurman, is calling for one of Britain's most revered imperial heroes to be branded a war criminal.

Mr Khalifa, a member of Sudan's ruling National Islamic Front and chairman of the committee commemorating the landmark September 1898 battle, is said to want to mount a posthumous case against Lord Kitchener at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

But the court deals only with civil cases, while the newly-constituted International Criminal Court, set up to deal with genocide and war cimes, has no retroactive powers.

"We are not aware of any legal format in which this could take place," the Foreign Office said last night.

Mr Khalifa also wants an apology from its northern neighbour Egypt — now, as then, at odds with the fundamentalist Islamic regime in Khartoum.

Tony Blair recently expressed regret for the Irish potato famine and Bill Clinton used a visit to Africa to apologise for the US role in the slave trade. Japan has been cagey about saying sorry for second world war atrocities, though Germany has done much to atone for its attempt to exterminate the Jews.

But Britain's imperial record may be off limits, with the Queen pointedly declining during her Indian visit last year to apologise for the Amritsar massacre of 1919.

And a leading British historian, Edward Spiers, said it was a risible idea to indict Lord Kitchener, still remembered for his luxuriant moustache and finger-pointing exhortation to young men on first world war recruiting posters.

His army was outnumbered by Sudanese forces at the battle, but the British and their Egyptian and Sudanese levies had the devastating firepower of the Maxim gun and their enemy did not. Khalifa's dervishes, armed only with rifles, lost 10,000 dead, while fewer than 500 British were killed.

Professor Spiers, editor of Sudan, a Reappraisal, said: "There is no cause for such a charge against Kitchener. He fully implemented British policy. He did it at minimal risk to the Egyptian and British lives under his command and he did it in a fully professional and methodical manner.

"Apologising is a dangerous and misguided concept because you'd be judging people by the standards of the moment rather than by any objective standard of historical evidence. Actions at Omdurman might have been a cause of surprise if CNN cameras had been present on the battlefield, but they weren't. Nothing that was done there was out of character for Sudanese warfare."

Sudan's London embassy, whose ambassador was recalled following British support for the recent US attack on a Khartoum pharmaceutical factory, said there was no formal demand to indict Kitchener.

The general faced far greater controversy when he set up what were innocently called "concentration camps" during the Boer revolt against British rule in South Africa. He was mourned by millions when he was drowned when his ship struck a mine in 1916.

This week Sudan demanded that the US pay reparations to victims of last month's bombing of what the regime insists was a factory producing medicines, not chemical weapons financed by the terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden.

Leader comment, page 13

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Transsexual pilot wins £77,000 award over discrimination claim

A TRANSSEXUAL pilot was yesterday awarded more than £77,000 by a tribunal which ruled that a flight company had discriminated against her.

Kristina Sheffield, aged 52, of Ealing, west London, won her legal battle against Air Foyle in July. Yesterday, an industrial tribunal at Bedford ruled that she should be awarded £14,897 for injury to feelings and £62,745 for loss of potential earnings.

Ms Sheffield, a grandmother, who was born a man and who used to be known as Ian Sheffield, had argued that Air Foyle, based at Luton Airport, Bedfordshire, was guilty of sex discrimination when it refused her a job interview because she was a transsexual. She had applied to be a pilot with EasyJet, also based at Luton, whose recruiting had been handled by Air Foyle.

A former Royal Air Force and Britannia pilot, Ms Sheffield had 32 years of flying experience. She contended that she was suitably qualified and should have been given an interview. Air Foyle denied discrimination, arguing that other pilots found her difficult to work with as she flaunted her sexuality.

Ms Sheffield, who had a sex change operation in 1986, has also fought an unsuccessful battle in the European courts over her new sexual status. She claimed that the Government was wrong to prevent her from altering her birth certificate from male to female status. But in July the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the Government's favour.

After yesterday's hearing, Ms Sheffield said: "I have had to fight very hard over the past 12 years. This is by far the biggest victory I have had. I have had to fight for my job and status as a person. I'm very pleased with the award. I think the tribunal has accepted that wrong was done to me and given proper compensation. Whether this will affect attitudes towards me [in] the rest of the airline industry, who can tell?"

Ms Sheffield told the tribunal that she had struggled to find long-term work since becoming a woman 13 years ago. In the past two years, she had worked only on short-term contracts obtained through agencies, mostly for foreign airlines. Since the tribunal hearing in April she had not worked and had relied on benefits for income. "I am an ordinary human being. I have a job that I am fully capable of doing and anyone who takes me on would find they had a loyal employee."

She fiercely rejected Air Foyle's suggestions that she flaunted her femininity or found it hard to work with other pilots.

In a statement after the hearing Air Foyle said: "In view of the amount of damages awarded to Ms Sheffield, Air Foyle will be appealing against this judgment. Air Foyle ... has always maintained a policy of being an equal opportunities employer and it does not operate a sexual discrimination policy.

"At the time that Ms Sheffield applied for a pilot's job with [us] — one of over 500 applicants for 12 positions — the company already [had] the second highest ratio of female pilots in the industry."

British woman raped in Greece

Helena Smith in Athens

POLICE are searching fields and villages in northern Greece for two Albanians accused of brutally raping a British woman as she walked towards the site of Aristotle's school.

The 46-year-old tourist was gang-raped in a cave over a period of 12 hours after being abducted in broad daylight by three men hiding near the site.

Last night a third Albanian, identified as Arian Kiku, 23, was remanded in custody after a local public prosecutor formally charged him in connection with the crime.

Police said the illegal immigrant, who will appear before an investigating magistrate today, was arrested after the London-born woman managed to escape. Kiku identified his accomplices as Ren and Regim Rina, unemployed brothers who had also made the illicit crossing into Greece from the former Stalinist state.

The victim is helping police track down her assailants following her release yesterday from a hospital in Naoussa, where the archaeological site is located.

Nikolas Voutsinos, a doctor who treated her, confirmed she had been badly beaten by the men but was in "generally good condition". The woman told police the three men repeatedly attacked her after she refused to reveal her bank card's personal identification number. She said she got away after the brothers had left the cave, and Kiku, who had been guarding her, had fallen asleep.

"She's a very brave woman," said Petros Papageorgiou, who heads the police force in Naoussa. "We've rounded up about 50 Albanians from fields and villages across the region and she's been trying to identify the brothers."

A classics buff, the woman had been travelling alone through Greece since flying into Salonika.

There has been a big increase in crime in the region since neighbouring Albania descended into anarchy with the collapse of pyramid investment schemes last year.

"Murders and robberies have soared, and Albanians have been blamed for nearly all of them," said Mr Papageorgiou. "Locals feel very angry about this latest incident and very sorry for this woman."

Was Lord Kitchener a hero or a villain? Should he, as Sudan has apparently suggested, be arraigned before an international court as a war criminal to mark the hundredth anniversary of the battle, in reality the slaughter, of Omdurman?

Leader comment, page 13

News in brief

French minister in coma after surgery

FRANCE'S outspoken interior minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, was in a coma yesterday after suffering a heart attack during a routine gallbladder operation. Best known for his resignation of the defence portfolio in protest at France's involvement in the 1991 Gulf war, he is to be temporarily replaced by the overseas territories minister, Jean-Jack Queyranne.

Officials said the heart attack appeared to have been triggered by a reaction to the anaesthetic. Surgeons at the Val-de-Grace military hospital in Paris, where the 59-year-old minister was admitted on Wednesday, rescuscitated him but he remained in a coma. — *Jon Henley, Paris.*

Malaysian crisis deepens

MALAYSIA'S political crisis deepened yesterday as the sacked deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, protested that he was the victim of a high-level conspiracy and vowed to fight to clear his name, and the authorities took legal action which many believe could lead to his arrest. In his first comments since he was sacked by the prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, the 51-year-old Dr Anwar said he had the evidence to establish his innocence.

The feud has raised fears that Dr Mahathir may be preparing a wider crackdown, as he did a decade ago when he ordered the arrest of 108 people. — *Nick Cumming-Bruce, Bangkok.*

Inquiry leads to cardinal

MAGISTRATES investigating a loan-shark ring in southern Italy have discovered bank accounts apparently indicating that the archbishop of Naples was a direct beneficiary of the usury, Italian newspapers reported yesterday. The accounts, it is claimed, show Cardinal Michele Giordano and some of his nephews received money that originated from victims of the sharks, who reportedly charged interest rates of up to 400 per cent a year.

The cardinal's brother, Mario Lucio Giordano, and the director of a bank in their home town were arrested last month. Cardinal Giordano has admitted providing financial assistance to his brother but previously there had been no evidence he benefited from his brother's activities. — *Philip Willan, Rome.*

King helps free gardener

A MOROCCAN gardener was due to walk free from a French prison today after President Jacques Chirac and King Hassan of Morocco intervened to end his 18-year sentence early. Omar Raddad has served four years for murdering a rich heiress, Ghislaine Marchal, in a mysterious case in which it was believed she had scrawled her murderer's name in blood as she lay dying.

But investigations found no evidence that Raddad had been in the boiler room where Marchal died. It was also puzzling that the 65-year-old heiress had made a basic grammatical mistake, writing "Omar m'a tuer" instead of "tuée".

Raddad, aged 36, has not been pardoned and the case is still officially unsolved. — *Paul Webster, Paris.*

Balloon comes back to earth

A GIANT Canadian weather balloon that went out of control last weekend and survived the attempts of military jets from several countries to shoot it down has landed on the Aland islands off Finland's south-west coast, officials said yesterday. Earlier Canadian jet fighters had fired more than 1,000 rounds at it. — *AP, Helsinki.*

Lebanese heroine released

THE leader of the Israeli militia the South Lebanon Army yesterday freed a Lebanese woman who had spent 10 years in prison for shooting and wounding him in a daring assassination attempt. An SLA statement said Antoine Lahd had released Soha Bishara from the militia's notorious Khiam jail, home to scores of Lebanese prisoners in south Lebanon, for humanitarian reasons.

Ms Bishara, a potent symbol of resistance to Israel's occupation of parts of south Lebanon, arrived in Beirut hours after her release. She became a legend at 21 when she pumped bullets into General Lahd's chest after befriending his wife. — *Reuters, Beirut.*

Ousting of Savimbi denied

SENIOR members of Angola's former rebel movement Unita loyal to its veteran leader, Jonas Savimbi, yesterday dismissed a statement by a breakaway faction that it was suspending him as leader. Horacio Junjuvili, a Unita negotiator in Angola's peace process, said: "These people have no support. It's five of them and no one else." Angola's MPLA government expelled Unita representatives from parliament and the government of national unity on Monday, accusing Unita of failing to disarm.

The breakaway faction, led by Jorge Valentim, said on Wednesday it was suspending Mr Savimbi. Mr Valentim has been joined by several other expelled Unita ministers. — *Reuters, Luanda.*



Rotting pears and tomatoes make poor pickings for an elderly woman in a St Petersburg street market as the value of the rouble tumbles PHOTOGRAPH: ANATOLY MALTSEV

Food fears add to crisis

James Meek in Moscow

- Chernomyrdin struggles for votes despite far-right backing of "experienced surgeon'
- Pricey imports empty Moscow shelves as shortages loom in far east and south
- Banks besieged after state reneges on promise to protect value of savings

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin's nominee for prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, makes his second attempt to win parliamentary approval today as concern about the security of the country's food supplies increases.

Andrei Kokoshin, head of the security council, admitted yesterday that the far east and some southern regions were experiencing problems, but said there was no danger of hunger.

Cities like Moscow, which is heavily dependent on imported food, were at some risk of shortages, he said, but he pointed out that the country still had 18 million tonnes of grain from this year's harvest.

The fall in the value of the rouble and the paralysed political and economic system have resulted in the price of imported goods — and domestic goods with foreign ingredients — soaring, without a corresponding increase in wages or pensions.

A typical monthly pension of 400 roubles, worth £40 three weeks ago, is now worth £18.

Russia was not self-sufficient in food in Soviet times, and the collapse of state farms since then has made it less so. Most meat is imported, and even milk producers have begun to depend on imported Tetrapak cartons.

To make things worse, northern Russia has had an abysmal summer of cold and rain, resulting in a feeble potato harvest on the allotments many poorer families depend on to support their diet.

Some shops were closed yesterday as their owners wondered how to adapt to currency rates changing several times a day. One grocery had large gaps on the shelves where goods had sold out and no new stocks had been delivered.

Possibly acting under pressure from panicking importers, Andrei Kushnerenko, a senior government foreign trade official, called for import duties to be slashed to avoid "serious food shortages".

Mr Chernomyrdin's desultory attempts to rein in the runaway rouble failed yesterday when the currency slumped again. Neither his examination of a crisis plan prepared by Argentinian, German and US experts, nor his promise to pay defaulted debts if the IMF gave Russia the money to do it, impressed the markets.

There were desperate scenes at branches of six of the country's biggest commercial banks as depositors tried to rescue their savings after the acting government reneged on its promise to protect them.

Depositors were told that their hard-currency accounts would be transferred to the state savings bank and converted into roubles at August's rate, effectively slashing their value.

Moscow employment agencies say that between 40,000 and 100,000 white collar employees in banks, brokerages and insurance companies could lose their jobs in the next two months, Interfax news agency reported.

"Proletarians with stones will be replaced by representatives of the middle class banging mobile phones on the hoods of expensive foreign-made cars," said Vladimir Solovyov of the Univeral Personnel agency.

Mr Chernomyrdin, who was rejected in the Duma by 253 votes to 94 on Monday, is likely to do better today. For reasons as obscure as his original rejection, the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky said his LDPR party — which has 11 per cent of the 450 Duma seats — would support the former prime minister this time.

"A surgeon who has sent 200 patients to the morgue may cure the 201st," Mr Zhirinovsky said. "Of course we have pity for the 200 victims, but that makes him an experienced surgeon."

That still leaves Mr Chernomyrdin well short of the 226 votes he needs to form a government. If the Duma rejects him three times, Mr Yeltsin must dissolve it.

There was frantic political manouevring yesterday on the eve of the vote as Mr Chernomyrdin and the leader of the dominant opposition party, Gennady Zyuganov of the Communists, lobbied for the support of the powerful regional governors who sit in the upper house.

The Yeltsin camp tried to revive the president's proposal to surrender some powers in return for a Chernomyrdin government, but the Communists and their allies refused to trust Mr Yeltsin's word.

The previous offer collapsed at the weekend because the Communists insisted on the transfer of powers to parliament being enshrined in law.

Taliban 'executed thousands as troops took northern city'

Richard Galpin in Islamabad

AFGHANISTAN'S Taliban militia massacred thousands of civilians after capturing the key northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif from the opposition last month, Amnesty International said yesterday.

Its report quoted the testimonies of witnesses and survivors who said the victims were mostly from the Shi'ite Hazara community, one of the many ethnic minorities living in the country's north.

Witnesses said Taliban troops, in the first days of taking the city that was once the headquarters of the opposition alliance, had executed people in their homes, the streets and the surrounding areas.

Amnesty says it has reports that a group of 70 men was slaughtered at an important Shi'ite shrine in the city, appearing to confirm the worst fears of the international community, which has been increasingly concerned in recent weeks at the fate of ethnic minorities in the area.

The Taliban have persistently refused to allow journalists or independent observers to visit Mazar-i-Sharif.

Reprisals had been expected: about 2,000 Taliban troops were massacred in May last year when the militia tried to capture the city. There is also particular hostility between the Sunni Taliban and Shi'ite Hazaras.

Much of Amnesty's information is corroborated by other witnesses and reliable sources who in recent days have given statements confirming that the Hazara community was targeted and that systematic searches were made of their houses.

One source said people were so frightened they did not leave their homes to bury members of their families who had been shot. Many bodies lay in the streets for days before being buried.

Estimates of how many people were killed vary enormously. One man who is likely to have given a reliable estimate said he believed about 4,000 people had died in the fighting for the city and since the Taliban took control on August 8. Most, he said, were Hazaras.

"On the first day, the Taliban shot many people. Whoever was on the streets was killed," he said. "Over the next few days they searched houses in the districts dominated by the Hazaras."

He and other sources also confirm Amnesty's statement that thousands of people were arrested.

According to one source, other ethnic minorities were released after a few days, but the Hazaras were singled out and many of them transported to other prisons and detention centres in the region.

"It's rumoured that many of them died as they were being transported — in lorries from Mazar-i-Sharif to Sheberghan," he said. "They suffocated."

Significantly, Amnesty also quotes witnesses as saying that the 10 Iranian diplomats and a journalist who have been missing since the city fell last month were killed.

The fate of the diplomats has led to a rapid escalation in tension between Afghanistan and Iran.

Mandela fails in peace initiatives

Alex Duval Smith in Durban

SOUTH AFRICA'S leadership ambitions in Africa and the developing world lay in tatters yesterday, after it lost control of diplomatic efforts to end the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the 113-nation Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference it hosted ended in acrimony.

By the end of the four-day conference here, President Laurent Kabila and his military allies had dismissed South African efforts to bring peace to Congo, and President Nelson Mandela had alienated India over nuclear proliferation.

The tense atmosphere over a range of issues affecting countries within the NAM — described as the voice of the developing world — overshadowed South Africa's ambition of modernising the movement during its forthcoming three-year tenure.

Diplomats believe the Durban Paper — which will emerge from the four-day conference — will be as watered-down as previous mission statements have been, giving credence to Western criticism that the movement is little more than a talking shop.

The South African president-designate, Thabo Mbeki, had asked the summit to address issues that could realistically achieve consensus — globalisation, the fight against drugs and terrorism, and the need for the developing world to have a greater voice in international institutions.

Instead, the conference of foreign ministers and heads of state was dominated by the visit of President Kabila who used it to call — successfully — for military support for his government, before ordering two bottles of Chivas Regal to his Hilton hotel room, drinking them and leaving.

At the same time, President Mandela — and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) — executed a diplomatic about-turn when he said it was "quite reasonable" for a "legitimate government" invaded by a foreign force to request military support from neighbours.

Earlier, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda — a non-member of the development community, which, along with Rwanda, has been accused by President Kabila of backing the rebels — told the Non-Aligned Movement conference that he would be prepared to "review the presence" of troops stationed in eastern Congo.

After failed attempts by South Africa to re-instil in the 37-year-old movement its cold-war position against nuclear proliferation, President Mandela lashed out at India's stance over Jammu and Kashmir, only to be accused by the Indian leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, of meddling in internal affairs.

President Mandela offered a warm greeting to the Cuban president, Fidel Castro, who delivered a flower power speech and begins an official visit to South Africa today.

The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, was afforded a similar welcome by President Mandela who condemned the "narrow and chauvinistic" administration of the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

The conference condemned Washington's missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan, both members of the movement.

The real Willy set to be freed at last

Bernard Scudder in Reykjavik

A UNITED States air force plane made a successful trial run yesterday in the operation to transfer the world's most famous killer whale back to his natural habitat.

Keiko, star of the Free Willy films, is to be moved next Thursday from an aquarium in Oregon in the US to a large floating seapen in a secluded bay off Iceland's Westman Islands.

The trial, intended to establish whether the US C-17 transport plane could land on the islands' tiny airstrip, had been postponed earlier this week due to strong winds.

But it was completed yesterday with only minor damage to the strip and the plane was set to return last night to Newport in Oregon to meet its five-ton passenger.

Keiko will be lifted from his two-million gallon pool and lowered into a custom-built container for loading on to the C17, the only plane capable of flying non-stop from Newport to Iceland.



Keiko, star of the Free Willy films, in his pool in Oregon, from where he will be flown by the US air force to Iceland

The flight is being paid for by the Free Willy Foundation, backers of which include Warner Bros, the Hollywood studio that released the first Free Willy film in 1993, and the cellular telephone magnate, Craig McCaw.

The foundation has campaigned for four years for the release of Keiko, who was caught in Icelandic waters as a baby and ended up in a tepid, cramped pool of artificially salted water in an amusement park in Mexico City.

When the film crew arrived to shoot Free Willy in 1992, Keiko was a ton underweight and suffering lesions.

The fight to free the real Willy began after the success of the film, in which a boy befriends a killer whale and helps him escape a theme park. He was moved to a specially built pool in Oregon two years ago.

Weather will be the big unknown in the plans for Keiko's journey home. The Westman Islands are prone to gales, although the seapen where Keiko will be kept is sheltered by cliffs.

The US air force will be monitoring wind conditions before taking off from Newport.

"The plane will leave on schedule unless the weather in Iceland is very bad, although of course we won't be taking any risks," Hallur Hallsson, the foundation's Iceland spokesman, said. "But the long-term forecast is looking good and we're optimistic it will all go smoothly."

Some Icelanders are surprised at the interest in Keiko. Jon Gunnarsson, who helped capture Keiko 18 years ago, said: "Keiko could yield enough meat to make 60,000 meatballs, which could feed many mouths in our hungry world." — *Reuters.*

"Tommy Soderberg does not fit the stereotype of the modern international coach. He does not write books or believe that faith healers can help win the World Cup."

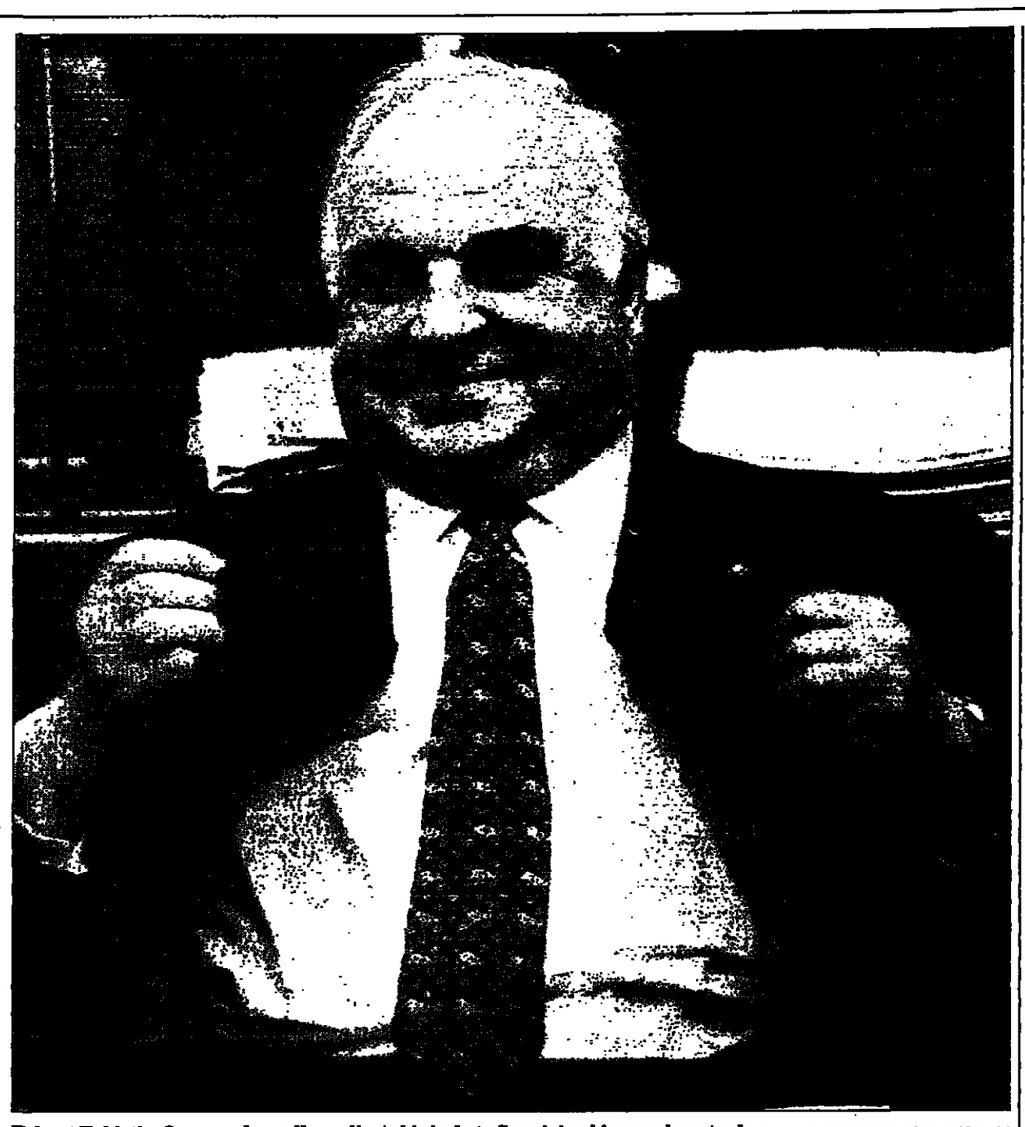
Marcus Christensen in Stockholm

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society

Every Wednesday in the The Guardian International

Russian roulette may be too late to save Kohl



Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor, adjusts his jacket after giving his speech yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: ARND WIEGMANN

Trailing in the ratings, the 'chancellor of unemployment' shamelessly played the foreign policy card in a Bundestag showdown with his challenger, Gerhard Schröder. But, writes Ian Traynor in Bonn, what looked good in parliament may not be enough at the polls

CHANCELLOR Helmut Kohl tried to salvage his flagging re-election chances yesterday by playing on voters' fears of an escalating crisis in Russia and of waves of refugees clamouring to enter Germany from the Balkans.

In a rousing 80-minute speech to the Bundestag, the lower house in Bonn, Mr Kohl offered a proud *tour d'horizon* of his 16 years in power and exploited the rouble's fall to appeal to Germans to vote for a safe pair of hands.

Mr Kohl pleaded with voters to opt for an internationally respected statesman rather than to trust the future of the country to "an experiment" in foreign policy under the inexperienced Gerhard Schröder, his Social Democrat challenger in the election on September 27.

With Mr Schröder replying for the opposition, it was the contenders' first face-to-face clash of the campaign. The showdown may represent a turning point for Mr Kohl, who is lagging in the opinion polls by up to six points.

If Mr Kohl emerges victorious three weeks next Sunday, yesterday's performance will be seen as one of his finest hours. If he loses, it may be called his parliamentary swansong.

"Russia is one of the most powerful countries on earth ... our most powerful neighbour," Mr Kohl said. He spoke of the "terrible danger and threat from the giant Russia" which was experiencing "critical days" and offered unstinting support, but no more money, for President Boris Yeltsin and his prime minister-designate, Viktor Chernomyrdin.

He also warned of a humanitarian catastrophe in the Serbian province of Kosovo this winter, triggering refugee waves which would head for Germany.

The Bundestag confrontation with Mr Schröder was supposed to focus on next year's budget, but Mr Kohl devoted the first half of his address solely to foreign policy. He ridiculed opposition jibes at his concentration on world affairs as proof of "the parochialism" of the Social Democrats.

'You're lost in the past, that's your problem ... Germany can't afford any more Kohl,' Schröder told him

But Mr Schröder, while bowing to the chancellor's foreign policy expertise, accused Mr Kohl of "irresponsibility" in playing the Russian card so nakedly and criticised Mr Kohl's "saunamate", Mr Yeltsin.

"You made a very long speech, Mr Chancellor," said Mr Schröder who spoke for less than an hour. "It was a speech about the past and anyone who heard it will see that you have problems with the present."

Reluctant to compete with Mr Kohl on foreign policy, the challenger concentrated on the chancellor's domestic record, noting that unemployment had been 1.8 million in 1982 when Mr Kohl became chancellor and was now 4.1 million.

"You are the chancellor of unemployment," he told Mr Kohl to raucous applause from the opposition benches. "You don't know or don't want to know the reality for the average employee in Germany ... You are lost in the past, chancellor, that's your problem ... Germany can't afford any more Kohl."

Mr Schröder added that the chancellor's refusal to engage in a pre-election television duel was proof of how far Mr Kohl was out of synch with the modern age.

"I would really like to discuss the state of the nation with you in front of the TV cameras. Come out of the past ... Let's discuss that together coolly," Mr Schröder said.

Unemployment is undoubtedly the prime issue in the election, yet Mr Kohl barely mentioned it in his speech, while Mr Schröder refused to let the issue drop.

If conventional wisdom dictates that foreign affairs cannot win elections in the West, Germany is different. The late Willy Brandt won on the strength of his *Ostpolitik* policy towards the Soviet bloc and communist east Germany. Elections in the 1970s and 1980s hinged on Cold War issues and nuclear missiles deployments. Mr Kohl won in 1990 as the Cold War's victor and Germany's unifier.

Pollsters and pundits agree that the Russian crisis could help Mr Kohl stage an 11th hour comeback. But although the chancellor seems to be banking on events in Moscow, few reckon that anything short of a Kremlin putsch will save him.

EU proposals for refugees 'will wipe out asylum rights'

Martin Walker in Brussels

EUROPE is pressing ahead with a plan to transform its policies on refugees and political asylum and remove their right to permanent settlement, despite claims by angry civil liberties groups and Greens in the European Parliament that it means "the end of the Geneva Convention".

The plan drafted by Austria, current holder of the European Union's presidency, has been given initial approval in principle by other member states. It starts from the principle that the Geneva Convention, designed to protect individuals fleeing political persecution, now covers only a small minority of refugees.

The plan is designed to meet sudden emergency influxes, such as those from the wars in Bosnia, Kosovo and Kurdistan, and proposes a four-stage policy of short-term protection. The essential feature, which breaks with the principle of the Geneva Convention, is that it does not give refugees the right to settle in the EU.

The first stage would be to try to handle the emergency on the ground, either by peacekeeping or "safe zones".

The second would be to keep refugees in the region, if necessary using EU funds to provide food, medical care and "temporary" camps. This policy was adopted for Palestinian refugees from Israel in 1948 — the camps are still in place 50 years later.

The third would be to grant temporary sanctuary in an EU country, with all member states sharing the cost. This would exclude the right to work and the right of residence. The fourth stage would be mandatory repatriation of the refugees to their homelands as soon as circumstances permit.

"This proposal is an attack on the principles of international law and human rights," the president of the Green group in the European Parliament, Magda Aelvoet of Belgium, said. "This clearly is in contradiction with the Geneva Convention, which established an individual right for asylum."

Some aspects of the scheme are already in train. EU officials have discussed setting up and financing camps in Turkey to house Iraqi refugees. The talks are stalled by Turkey's insistance on the camps being immune from inspection by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

"We have to recognise that circumstances have changed since the cold-war era of 1951, when the Geneva Convention was signed," the plan's author, Manfred Matzka, director-general for migration in the Austrian interior ministry, told the Guardian.

"Most refugees are not these days individuals who flee political persecution," Mr Matzka said. "They flee from civil wars like Bosnia, or from violent fundamentalism like Algeria. The Geneva Convention does not give us a proper instrument to deal with this kind of crisis and we need one.

"Our proposal does not do away with the Geneva Convention, but rather complements it. We want to keep the convention for individuals fleeing persecution, but set up a different system for the kinds of crises that produce massive refugee flows."

Mr Matzka is a controversial figure in Austria, where civil liberties groups blame him for the country's tough policy on repatriating refugees. The extreme rightwing nationalist leader Jorg Haider, on the other hand, has praised him as "our kind of guy".

Jack Straw and other EU home affairs ministers are to discuss the plan on September 24, and the Greens are trying to rally support for a declaration against the scheme by the European Parliament.

This looks unlikely, since neither the Christian Democrat nor the Social Democrat MEPs from Germany, their eyes on the September 27 German general election, want to be seen as "soft" on refugees. Germany took more than half Europe's refugees from Bosnia and refugees are a divisive political issue.

The Greens' campaign is weakened by a division in their ranks. Some want to stick firmly to the Geneva Convention, which has the force of international law. But a minority, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, say that since only 4 per cent of applicants under the convention are given asylum in the EU, more refugees might find sanctuary if the EU moved to a quota system of migrants from various countries.

Nato offers help with Serb plan

Martin Walker in Brussels

NATO is planning to dip a first cautious toe into Kosovo this winter, offering humanitarian assistance to the United Nations refugee agency to prevent a disaster overtaking at least 300,000 ethnic Albanians made homeless by the Serb offensives.

Nato ambassadors are offering air transport and logistics support. But the arrangement would require Serbian permission before the UN High Commissioner for Refugees could manage and distribute food, and it does not envisage armed Nato forces protecting convoys or distribution centres in Kosovo.

The International Crisis Group criticised the plan yesterday, saying the lessons of Bosnia and Kosovo were that "any operation that relies for protection on Serb security forces is not protected at all".

Nato ambassadors, who approved the plan in principle this week, are now asking their governments what aircraft and facilities can be *made available*.

In effect, the proposal makes Nato a partner in the Serbian scheme for four humanitarian aid centres in Kosovo to be run by non-governmental organisations and the UNHCR, and to be provided with "security" by Serb troops.

Kosovo officials have already objected that the centres would amount to Serbian concentration camps, whose running costs would be paid by the international community.

Morton Abramowitz, a representative of the International Crisis Group and a former United States secretary of state, told a meeting at the European parliament yesterday: "The only serious protection that can be provided is by an armed Nato force to defend supplies and refugees, and I do not believe that is on the cards."

He added: "It's crazy to think that Kosovar woman and children will put themselves under the protection of Serbian forces who have been shooting their husbands and fathers."

Nato planners, who have prepared a range of military options including air strikes, are privately frustrated at the refusal of Nato governments to take a decision to stop Serb aggression.

Nato's offer of humanitarian aid reflects its wish to be seen to be doing something for Kosovo's 2 million ethnic Albanians.

"There is a new sense that the international community has to redouble its efforts to get the negotiation process back on track," a senior Nato official said.

But the negotiations, which are aimed at getting Kosovo to accept autonomy under Serb sovereignty, have been hampered by the bitter disputes between Kosovo's main Albanian party, led by Ibrahim Rugova, and the militants of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and by the success of the Serb offensive against the guerrillas.

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Analysis
Liberalism



Russia under Tsar Boris 12

Liberals in search of an ism

Paddy Ashdown unveiled the latest package of Liberal policies yesterday. They're remarkably eclectic, says David Walker. But then liberalism is a contradictory affair. Look at these men, Paddy Ashdown's predecessors and influences. Will the real liberal please stand up?

IT'S Christmas, 1911. The twentieth century's greatest Liberal is taking a well-earned break after a tumultuous year. David Lloyd-George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, has just introduced National Insurance, a government scheme that for the first time will guarantee some income for old people. He has faced down the unelected House of Lords, giving Britain its first taste of popular democracy. He plans to give the Irish self-government. The Welsh wizard holidays in Cannes. But where does he stay? In a house loaned him by a forebear of the Daily Mail Rothermere who died this week, brother of Lord Northcliffe, originator of a potent brand of rightwing, reactionary journalism which had already shown its power by whipping up hatred of the Germans.

What does that vignette tell us about liberalism? It's not just about Lloyd George, the man whose sexual activities in the Cabinet room put Bill Clinton to shame and who within a year was being accused of under-the-counter dealings in Marconi shares[1]. It says that holding political power usually means choices and compromises and unsavoury alliances. It's a lesson Paddy Ashdown has been trying to teach his party. Perhaps it explains his decision to junk his party's civil rights inheritance and vote with Labour on its anti-terrorist bill. Underneath his holier-than-thou-Tony rhetoric he was at it again yesterday as he unveiled his party's latest platform, a jackdaw's pick of policies, none of them outlandish. But Ashdown has a problem, which he inherited from Lloyd George, who went on to become one of the most interventionist and activist prime ministers ever, riding roughshod over civil rights, extending the reach of government in every nook and cranny of national life. It's his party's name. The Social Democrats may have been absorbed but there it remains, that word liberal. What on *earth does it mean?*

Herbert Morrison (Peter Mandelson's grandfather) once wittily said socialism was what a Labour government does. After Lloyd George's demise, liberalism was what the Bonham-Carter and Grimond families said it was. Perhaps now it's what Paddy Ashdown can swing through his committees past the bearded ones and those ranks of well-meaning but rather vague councillors. Socialism is dead, defined as the project to overturn and replace capitalism. Conservatism is in a state of terminal confusion over what should be conserved in an age of market-driven change. Is liberalism is in any better nick? When (in private at least) Mr Ashdown claims Tony Blair as one of his, the confusion of categories only grows.

Some people say articulated principles don't matter especially in British party politics where the geometry of Parliamentary power decides so much. You can smell a reactionary at ten paces, of left or right. Liberalism is a reflex, an instinct of generosity towards the underdog . . . Ludovic Kennedy just has to be a Liberal. What liberals care passionately about is Byron's "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind"*, liberty. What inflamed the poet and Gladstone after him was its absence and signs of oppression and unfreedom[2]. Perhaps, as Alan Ryan puts it, liberalism is the sum of its discontents; it is a permanent state of revulsion at bullies, bigness and unfairness[3]. But that makes forming manifestos and drawing up party programmes difficult and doesn't give you much of an intellectual basis for understanding a complicated world. It could sound like a recipe for permanent minority status. As Gladstone (an imperialist) and Lloyd George (a warmonger) showed, Liberals in power tend to behave remarkably like the rest of them. Tony Blair should make Paddy Ashdown foreign secretary — he would turn out as "realist" as Lord Curzon or Lord Carrington. Few isms are coherent, but liberalism has particular problems. In it irresolvable conflicts are embedded and always have been.

The first is between freedom and government. Frederick Hayek, Margaret Thatcher's supposed economics guru, once wrote an essay entitled Why Am I Not A Conservative — conservatives are dangerously promiscuous about the powers of the state and he, like Ludwig von Mieses, Milton Friedman and many other liberal originators of mainstream economics, sees government as the enemy of prosperity and material progress[4]. Government, to a generation coming of age in Europe in the Thirties, meant Stalinist or Fascist oppression. These "economic liberals" readily connected with the milder, indigenous Anglo-Scots tradition based on Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill and their confidence that liberty would automatically lead to the right choices being made. But government can also be *the promoter* of people's freedom, especially in the economic and social spheres. In the United States New Deal "liberals" believed that only by mobilising the power of the federal government could economic and social disadvantage be mitigated (and American capitalism be made to work better); ever since the American right has used "liberal" as a terrible swearword.

Yet in Britain, too, twentieth century liberalism got bound up with Big Government. William Beveridge appalled Conservative Churchill in 1942 with the extension of state power implied by his scheme for social insurance. Nowadays, if Labour renegade Frank Field is to be believed, state-backed insurance is considered much less "left wing" than full-scale state provision. As per yesterday Liberals are not at all abashed to talk compulsion in their social security schemes.

Perhaps political liberalism is just what's left of a 19th century tradition plus 20th century expediency. As Paddy Ashdown's review demonstrates, a lot is still owed to William Ewart Gladstone. He of course was a Tory Anglo-Catholic landowner who fortuitously had come to personify a set of values, northern, industrial, freedom-loving, protestant. This is the bourgeois liberalism which sees the state church as anathema, which espouses self-government for the Scots, Welsh and Irish but traditionally was not too keen on upsetting property arrangements.

IT was this spirit that led Gladstone to champion the rights of the oppressed nationalities in the Balkans against the Turks and, later, influenced the American president Woodrow Wilson in the disastrous Versailles settlement trying to align nationhood and "people", the results of which are still evident in Kosovo. As John Gray has forcefully pointed out, liberalism is shocked by its own consequences[5]. When people turn out to be congenital abusers of freedom and oppressed minorities themselves become oppressors of others, liberals are struck dumb. In Scotland, self-government could become the occasion of separatism; it is the Liberal Democrats, not only Labour, who are being squeezed by the rise of the Scottish Nationalists. The creation of the Irish Republic was the achievement of political Liberals and a fat lot of thanks they got — there are no identifiable liberals in the Dail.

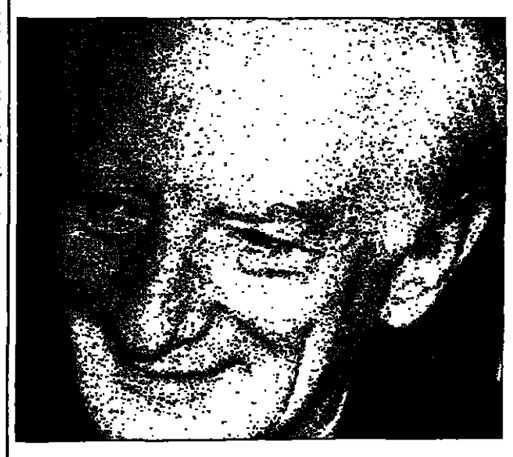
Paddy Ashdown and colleagues talked yesterday of "returning power to individuals" without explaining why the same phrase was used by Margaret Thatcher to justify her free market reforms. The core problem of liberalism, John Gray argues, is its pretence that we are all the same, that there are universal norms of right conduct on which historically *everyone is converging — a conceit* associated recently with American writer Francis Fukuyama to whom "liberal democracy is the final form of human government"[6]. But John Gray himself does not stop relying on the banalities of the liberal way of doing politics such as respect for opponents' arguments, recognition of their right to speak and the creation of conditions in which opinions, however diverse, can be represented. When fundamentalists and religious extremists threaten, liberal forms of conversation and conduct never looked more attractive.

PADDY Ashdown will doubtless say that philosophical difficulties are irrelevant as long as there is political space between Labour and the Tories and they don't want to colonise his issues, such as European federalism. ("Liberalism" gives you no clues on that: Frederick Hayek was quite keen on European union.) The Liberals' strongest card was and remains political procedure — reform of the constitution, the voting system and so on. At heart they still believe in all that comforting stuff about pavement politics and civic participation, contrary evidence about people's willingness to take part notwithstanding. But say the system of decision making were improved, what kind of policies should issue? What should the distribution of income be? How big ought the state be? Yesterday's answer seemed to be impeccably Millite: the people will decide. But one of the strongest lessons of the 20th century is that the people can be wrong-headed, malevolent, selfish and illiberal.

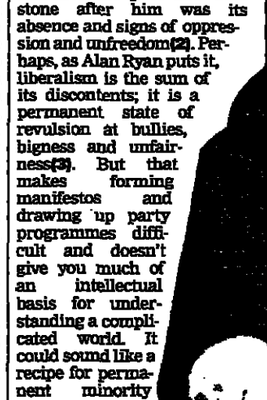
**Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!*
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art:
For there thy habitation is the heart —
The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy sons to fetters are consigned —
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
Sonnet on Chillon 1816











Ashdown (left) and earlier contributors to liberalism, loosely construed: (from right) David Lloyd George, Lord Byron, William Ewart Gladstone, Lord Beveridge, Frederick Hayek

PHOTOGRAPHS: BASSANO, JAN KOPER, JEAN-REGIS ROUSTAN, DAVID STEWART

Sources: (1) John Grigg, Lloyd George From Peace to War 1912-1914, Methuen 1985; (2) Alan Bullock and Maurice Shock, The Liberal Tradition, A & C Black, 1956; (3) Alan Ryan, New York Review of Books, September 24, 1998; (4) The Constitution of Liberty, Routledge, 1960; (5) Enlightenment's Wake, Routledge, 1995; (6) Post-Liberalism, Routledge, 1993.

David Walker edits Analysis.

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Comment

Diary

Matthew Norman

I AM ecstatic to receive in the post a hardback novel. "I could not resist the cover," writes the sender, who lavished a full 20p on the work in a library sale, "but failed to make any headway with the story itself." Perhaps we can do better with our new Book of the Month. It is All For Love, the 1988 classic by my old friend Rizla Rosie Boycott, the delectable Grand Duchess of dope now moonlighting as editor of the Express. All For Love is "a compelling drama of love and blackmail, politics and persuasion", according to the back-page blurb, "sweeping from a London Season to Sydney's corridors of power". Alas, lack of space allows only an *amuse-gueule* today as we turn to page 129. "He parted her legs abruptly, and forced his fingers . . ." Very Daily Express. More next week.

SHOULD Express owner Clive Hollick ever tire of Rizla Rosie, she might seek TV work with the BBC's unwatched but sparklingly eccentric News 24, where anything goes. A reader rings to report another instance of Reithian excellence, broadcast last week from the *Edinburgh festival*. When asked what it was in life that he found most exciting, he pondered briefly. "Well," he told the interviewer, "I s'pose that would be pissing on my girlfriend's Volvo." At least, that's what it sounded like.

ANYONE repelled by the above items, and sick to death of the gratuitous smut and tedious puerility that so informs this column, may wish to join the new Diary Focus Group. This will convene monthly in the Richmond and Twickenham area, and applicants should write appending a brief but trenchant critique.

THE Telegraph's report on Lord Rothermere's death is odd. "His private life was unconventional," it reads, "although he was a champion of traditional family values." Was he indeed? "Family values what does that phrase mean? I've not the least idea! It doesn't mean a thing . . . If men and women have a lover and they're happy, why is it anybody else's business?" That splendid quote comes from the Viscount's last major newspaper interview, published on August 5 1998 (in the Daily Telegraph).

AN android fan in London calls to kick off the Save Our Brinton campaign with a curious but heartwarming SOB story. Helen, he insists, has stated her intention to vote, in the forthcoming NEC elections, for the six-strong slate of left-wing candidates . . . including, would you believe, Liz Davies. Theories as to this quasi-Johnsonian conversion are twofold: either Helen realises the game is up, and seeks folk-hero status by becoming a rebel; or key wiring in her post-ironic matrix has short circuited. It is too soon to be certain which.

DLARY vicar Steve Chalke has vanished. Rev Steve, the man who in his own phrase "most coherently defines the zeitgeist", added yet another string to his already fulsome media bow on Wednesday when making his debut on the Today programme. Eager to offer congratulations, we left messages asking him to call. But call he did not, and concern grows for his safety. If you should see the Rev over the weekend in a TV or radio studio — or even, who knows, in the pulpit of his south London Baptist church — ask him to ring. We require a sermon on the Prodigal Son. Rev Steve, in the name of God, call. The fatted calf awaits.

A *N order form arrives* from Showlite, the contractor handling media electrical requirements at the Labour conference. Under "power", the price list varies from £37 to hire for a 2 amp socket, to a scary £80 for the full 13 amps. It is the little line beside this list that catches the eye. "No adapters will be allowed." Very New Labour. We are checking Companies House documentation even now, to verify that Dolly Draper is a Showlite director.



Moscow question: Would the IMF have ended the English civil war?

James Meek



HOW familiar does this sound? When a severe economic crisis led to deadlock between the head of state and parliament, the head of state rejected a political compromise giving more rights to the legislature, and dissolved it. He ruled without parliament for 11 years, imposing a harsh economic crackdown which balanced the budget, before a military, religious and ethnic crisis in his ramshackle realm forced him to summon MPs again, provoking a bloody nationwide conflict.

That was the run-up to the English civil war. It's also uncomfortably close to the developing scenario in Moscow. What would an IMF team, projected back through time, have prescribed the England of King Charles I, with its corruption, its oligarchic distribution of wealth and power and its troubled tax collection record? "Market reforms, your Majesty. You might care to privatise the royal parks."

Maybe our instincts are wrong. Maybe we should see the English civil war as a skirmish in the battle for sound money, rather than as part of a struggle over individual liberties, democracy, faith and national identity which was to continue in Britain for another three centuries, and continues still.

But I don't think so. And it shows no respect to Russia to see the confrontation between the State Duma and President Boris Yeltsin as an irritating sideshow to the economic crisis, or as a personal feud between wild, romantic Tsar Boris and the dull, puritan communist leader Gennady Zyuganov (who does, oddly, look a bit like Cromwell).

There are fools and knaves galore in parliament and the Kremlin. But the paradox is that although there are few real democrats on either side, it is democracy and its institutions they are fighting over, and that is what matters.

"The sources of our trouble, including the current financial crisis, are not in the economy," wrote Russian thinker Dmitri Furman this week.

"They are in politics, in our political system, which has created authorities that are beyond control. If you look more deeply, they are in the psychology and culture of the Russian people, which have made such authorities possible."

To anyone outside Russia, this might seem absurd. Russia is a democracy. Yeltsin was elected by universal suffrage in 1996. The constitution was approved in a referendum. Regional governors are elected, as are regional parliaments, mayors — the country is swimming in elections.

The reality, of course, is that democracy and elections are not the same thing. Even if all elections held in Russia had been free and fair — which they weren't — they would not guarantee civil rights. They would not guarantee observance of the constitution or the rule of law. They would not prevent corruption, nepotism and racism. These have to be fought in Russia every day. The price is a high one in ruined lives, broken ribs and journalists' corpses, and in an inability to cope with unforeseen economic change.

The start made to democracy in Russia has made the country's conservative majority wary because it seems to be about immense freedoms for a few. The idea that democracy is also about strong government enforcing the law has not taken hold because it has not been practised during the Yeltsin years. It is popular to say in Moscow that federal law extends out as far as the Moscow Ring Road, the boundary of the Russian capital. This is an exaggeration. It doesn't get that far. The elected mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, pays as little attention to the constitution as any of the other elected feudal bosses who run the country's other 88 regions.

Courts rule that the mayor's enforcement of residence permits in the city is illegal: he pays no attention. His police continue their racist, rapacious arresting and fining of dark-skinned Russians from other parts of the federation. The police are breaking the law on the streets of Mr Yeltsin's capital. Mr Yeltsin neither knows nor cares. No one hinders them.

IN Bashkortostan on the Volga, a local leader gets himself elected by rigging the vote and shutting down opposition newspapers. Mr Yeltsin congratulates him. In Kalmykia, the local president wins in an illegal poll. Later, a journalist who has opposed him is murdered. Mr Yeltsin expresses vague concerns. In Tatarstan, the ethnic Tatar authorities discriminate against ethnic Russians. Moscow looks the other way.

Embezzlement on a heroic scale among generals, bureaucrats and businessmen is revealed daily by the press. No action is taken. Industrialists steal from the factories they have privatised on the cheap and don't pay their workers or their taxes. Federal ministers who try to bankrupt them are obstructed. The country is run on a shrug and a backhander.

It is no shame for Russia to admit that the country which put the first man into space, which gave the world the periodic table, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Anton Chekhov, remains stranded at the time of Hobbes and Milton as far as democracy is concerned. Most Russians know it anyway. The West has had trouble understanding the issue.

Russia's scientists, engineers and artists have been able to flourish by building on the works of their foreign counterparts, as we have been able to build on the work of Russia's great minds. Russia has embraced the personal computer, the credit card and the stock exchange. But democracy is different. It can't be left to specialists. It can't be picked up from a handbook and applied. By its nature, it has to come from the people, otherwise it doesn't work. It has to be handed down from generation to generation, but Russia's young generation today is the one that has to begin the process, and its children are just going to school.

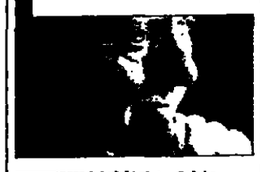
This is a hard thing for the West to help with. It is much easier to dole out money through the IMF than to support the growth of democratic institutions, particularly when that includes organisations like trades unions which in Britain, having succeeded too well, are considered old-fashioned. And how can the West "support democracy" without interfering in the affairs of a sovereign state whose people, as Furman points out, have been so sluggish in mass resistance to their kleptocratic rulers?

Yet the alternative is unacceptable to the liberal conscience: that only by enduring hundreds of years of civil strife can Russia, like the West, find its own, unique, painful way to democracy.

Decca Aitkenhead is away

Eternity of false smiles

Roy Hattersley



THE highlight of this year's Edinburgh Film Festival was the British premier of Primary Colours. When the book was published in 1996, few critics doubted that Joe Kline — Anonymous, as he describes himself on the jacket — was satirising Bill Clinton's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. The film, shot in Kline's almost constant presence, removed what doubts remained. John Travolta had a Clintonesque southern drawl, Clinton-style wire-wool hair, and emerged from the governor's mansion of a small southern state to win his way to the White House.

So, last week in Edinburgh, the audience sniggered with knowing laughter each time that Jack Stanton, the fictitious governor, was found guilty of a sexual indiscretion. When he extricated himself from his self-made difficulties with virtuoso performances of Deep South bokum about his mammy and the old folks at home, appreciative grunts echoed round the auditorium.

The film ended with President Stanton leading off the first dance at the inaugural ball. It was the conclusion, not the climax. The whole point of the film was summarised in Stanton's earlier justification of his dubious election tactics: *"We live an eternity of false smiles — and why? Because it's the price you pay to lead . . . And that's what it's all about. The opportunity to do that, to make the most of it, to do the right thing — because you know as well as I do there are plenty of people in this game who never think about the folks. They just want to win . . . And ask yourself this: Is there anyone else out there with a chance to actually win this election, who'd ever think about the folks I care about?"*

THAT apologia can be interpreted in two ways. It can be applauded as a heroic compromise between principle and pragmatism — the honest statement of an honourable man who knows that his deeply held beliefs can only be put into effect if he jumps through the hoops of democratic politics. Or it can be dismissed with impatience, if not contempt, as the lame excuse that winners always offer to justify the conscientious price they paid for victory.

The argument about honesty dominated the 1992 Democratic Convention under the shorthand title of The Willie Horton Incident. Michael Dukakis, the defeated Democrat in 1989, had led in the polls until it was revealed that he had signed the warrant for the parole of a convicted murderer and rapist. Once released, Horton killed and raped again. Dukakis, it was claimed, lost the election because he could not bring himself to say that the episode had convinced him that the death penalty was the proper sentence for murder. In New York six years ago, Clinton did not make the same mistake. The states, he insisted, must have the federal right to hang, electrocute and gas. The liberals all told the faint hearts not to worry: "Wait until he gets elected."

We did not have to wait for long. A whiff of grapeshot from the Pentagon and the gay-rights programme was abandoned. Hillary Clinton's excessively hyped Medicare taskforce produced nothing that even resembled viable legislation. The Moynahan Compromise, which should have appealed to a president who wanted to match radicalism and realism, was ignored. Then, just before his second campaign, President William Jefferson Clinton signed into law a Bill that had been passed by the Republican-dominated Congress. It actually reduced health and welfare provision. "Tactics," said his apologists. "Wait for the second term. He'll right all his own wrongs then." For that we are still waiting.

While we are waiting, the president presides over an economic policy which could easily have been written in Wall Street and probably was. But the middle classes are prospering. When the commentators wrote that Americans were more interested in Dow Jones than Paula Jones, it was not the dirt farmers and the ghetto families that they were thinking of. I have no idea what went on between Ms Jones and Mr Clinton and I have no wish to know. Nor am I concerned about his relationship with Monica

My complaint is that Clinton is the most reactionary president

Lewinsky. My complaint is that he is the most reactionary Democratic president since the civil war. Among the "eternity of false smiles" was the glance which promised that, because he was young and talked of hope, he might extend the Great Society Programme to folks he claimed to care about.

I have lost too many elections to need a lecture about the importance of winning. But victory without a purpose is pointless. Politicians who start to compromise their beliefs because it is necessary during the campaign get into the habit of compromising.

Primary Colours kept the audience laughing, but it is essentially a tragedy. For it satirises more than Bill Clinton. It is what, in the black-and-white days of gangster movies, we used to call an exposé — an exposé of soundbite, focus group, opinion poll-dominated politics.

One senior policeman's opinion is to be enough under the Terror Bill. As it was sufficient in the Stalker case, no doubt

Word of an officer

Ian Aitken

ONE can't help wondering who was responsible for the publication of the report of Chris Mullin's committee on home affairs on the same day Parliament was summoned back to rush through the Terrorism Bill. Rarely can a parliamentary report have had such immediate relevance.

The Bill, which raised libertarian anxieties in people as diverse as Tony Benn and former premier John Major, aims to give special status to the word of senior police officers against people accused of belonging to illegal organisations such as the Real IRA.

But the Mullin report raises real doubts about the word of police officers, no matter how senior they may be.

Mr Mullin, the committee chairman, was one of many who warned in Wednesday's foreshortened debate against the frenzied haste with which the Bill was being rushed through Parliament. As the MP who campaigned tirelessly to have the convictions of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four quashed, Mullin knows more than most about the fallibility of police evidence.

Now his committee has exposed the fact that Greater Manchester police tried to keep secret its out-of-court payment of £10.6 million in damages and costs to the defendants in a malicious prosecution which collapsed. The scale of the pay-out was only revealed when Mr Mullin and his colleagues put the screws on the present chief constable of Manchester. In short, it must have been a lot of malice to be worth paying that much.

That alone would be instructive about the forthrightness of top policemen. But what makes the report especially relevant to the Government's knee-jerk reaction to the Omagh bombing is that the collapsed prosecution in question was, in the eyes of almost everyone except the

It must have been a lot of malice to be worth police paying out £10 million

Manchester police, closely linked to another piece of police jiggery-pokery — the so-called Stalker Affair.

John Stalker had been the deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester, and he was chosen in the mid-1980s to investigate an allegation that the Royal Ulster Constabulary was operating a "shoot to kill" policy towards IRA suspects. Half way into the inquiry, Stalker was suddenly removed, amid false suggestions that he was corruptly linked with a Manchester businessman called Kevin Taylor.

Stalker himself was in no doubt that he had been getting too close to the truth in his investigation of the RUC, and had to be stopped by whatever means available. True or false, it is a fact that his friendship with Taylor led to Taylor's prosecution for fraud. It was this trial which collapsed ignominiously and led to Taylor's action for damages for malicious prosecution. The police capitulated just before Mr Taylor was due to give evidence.

Putting it euphemistically, the Taylor and Stalker cases exude a rather unpleasant pong. But at the very least they provide a valuable warning about relying on police evidence. There have been enough recent miscarriages of justice to make one uneasy.

Sir Frederick Lawton, an Appeal Court judge with no great reputation for wet liberalism, writing to the Times yesterday, mocked the Government's insistence that police evidence about IRA membership can be tested in court. How could it be tested without naming the source of the original information, he asked. Yet if the names were not forthcoming, the policeman's word could only be based on hearsay, or even hearsay founded on hearsay.





But, of course, the underlying defence of the Government's admittedly spatchcocked Bill is that these are dangerous times, and that what is at stake is the saving of human life. After Omagh it is an appealing argument, even if it implies that the odd injustice is a price worth paying. Indeed, it was used by the French to defend torture in Algeria.

But it misses the point. What the Real IRA wants *most is* to provoke an over-the-top reaction to its outrage and thus to get the war going again. The best way to deal with provocation is not to be provoked.

هكذا من الأصل

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'The considerable delays in operating out of hours are due to lack of porters'
Philip McCahy, Letters

And finally: News at Ten

It's a success not a failure

ITV MAKES a robust case for moving *News at Ten* to 6.30pm which raises basic issues about the role of public service broadcasting in the digital age. Richard Eyre, chief executive, points out that ITV is a competitive broadcaster facing unprecedented competition from the plethora of channels that the digital revolution will spawn. ITV research shows that 27 per cent of its audience switches off at 10pm. If ITV could liberate that space for more popular programmes then its ratings would rise, enabling it to generate more money to make better dramas and other crowd-pulling programmes to meet the new competition. It is not just a question of whether the main news should be at 10pm (or split between 6.30pm and 11pm as it would be under the new proposals) but whether a commercial decision like this should be taken by ITV or by a quango like the Independent Television Commission which has the last word.

Others like Peter Bazalgette, the independent producer, go much further. He told the Edinburgh Television Festival that the days when state control was needed to ensure that scarce radio and television wavelengths were fairly used for the benefit of all were gone forever now that the almost infinite possibilities of digital were imminent. He wants all the public service obligations on ITV and Channel 5 abolished and more privatisation including a ban on ITV companies (Granada, Anglia etc) making anything other than news programmes.

There is another way of approaching this problem. It is that Britain has an unusually rich and diverse spectrum of television which we should be very wary of tampering with. It ranges from the publicly owned BBC through the ITV companies, all of which are subject to public service obligations on programming (like how much airtime is devoted to education, religion, news and so forth), to Rupert Murdoch's satellite operations. These are also licensed though, sadly, much less tightly than the BBC and ITV in order to ensure standards of impartiality and decency. The new digital channels will also have public service obligations attached to their licences.

It is by no means certain that the explosion of channels will sweep ITV's mass audience from under its feet. Fears that the post would be exterminated by fax or email have so far proved false — and newspapers are still with us despite the competitive threats from television and the internet. ITV is free to move over to one of the hundreds of new lightly-regulated satellite channels if it wishes but of course it doesn't want to lose the manifest advantages of its present position. ITV stresses that its audience drops by 27 per cent at 10pm. What it doesn't emphasise at the same time is that *News at Ten* reaches 5.6 million viewers — an audience that every newspaper would kill for. The latest figures show that *News at Ten* has increased its viewing figures by 8 per cent in recent months while the BBC's Nine O'Clock News has lost 17 per cent over the last year (to 4.6 million). *News at Ten* is thus not only an impressive success in the market place but also is impressively fulfilling its public service obligation by getting 5.6 million people to watch a serious news programme. It should be proudly trumpeting this success instead of trying to shuffle off its public responsibility for a few more quick bucks. If the shunting of the news to a later slot leads to a fall in viewing of a million or two then the whole nation will be that much less informed. The time may come when the proliferation of channels forces a reappraisal of public service obligations, but it hasn't happened yet. It will only become inevitable if ITV makes the demise of news self-fulfilling. Meanwhile, it should stop cherry-picking with its public service obligations.

Third party

Keep them honest, Paddy

IN WHAT is still in England a two-horse race, one of the most important functions for the Liberal Democrats is to keep the others honest. Irresponsibility, meaning the low probability of assuming office, becomes strength. Paddy Ashdown has a keen sense of this role, which is why his decision to support the Government so unquestioningly this week over the terrorism legislation was especially disappointing. Tony Blair did not need his party's votes. He did need Mr Ashdown calmly and proportionately to voice misgivings about rushing through a confused bill touching basic rights and liberties. Sometimes, the ex-soldier's habit of obedience encourages him to bend deferentially to the executive; sight of the glittering prize of public office may have blinded him to the political fact that liberalism works best as criticism of the misuse of power. Yet there he was yesterday announcing a set of policy proposals the intellectual basis of which is scepticism about the state, its services and powers. If we had to choose between Paddy the radical and Mr Ashdown the statesman-in-waiting the former wins hands down.

Not that the policy package being offered is pathbreaking. That is a good phrase and the Liberal Democrats ought to do more skirmishing along the boundaries of what is thinkable, especially now that Labour's own thinkers have gone so dull and history has petrified the Tories. The LD package offers some good ideas mixed in with old chestnuts and a cobwebby visit to John Major's Citizen's Charter. Mr Ashdown of course is not entirely unencumbered by government himself. He gives a hostage to fortune in promoting the idea of citizen armies storming the bureaucratic redoubt. Despite losses in May, the LDs *are* the government in a significant number of local authorities and their record, to put it kindly, is mixed.

As always they are more impressive playing at home on the Lords, proportional representation and other constitutional reform than winning away fixtures on macroeconomic or fiscal policy. The Blair/Clinton chatter about a "Third Way" has been inconsequential, except insofar as it says there is no wish to increase the relative size of government, which in the United Kingdom is now about 40 per cent of GDP. Do the LDs agree or do they envisage Britain taking the Continental path towards bigger government? The Fabian Society this week launched its bid to ginger up Labour's thinking about taxation. There is plenty of space for an LD flanker.

Postdated guilt

Pointing the finger at Kitchener

WAS Lord Kitchener a hero or a villain? Should he, as Sudan has apparently suggested, be arraigned before an international court as a war criminal to mark the hundredth anniversary of the battle — in reality the slaughter — of Omdurman? No doubt by the standards of the Geneva Convention, Kitchener's behaviour would be found wanting — wounded enemy soldiers were routinely finished off on the battlefield — but late-Victorian rules of engagement were rather less precisely defined. If Kitchener is to be retrospectively found guilty, then so are most of his contemporaries, including Sudan's great hero the Mahdi, the killer of Gordon. Ironically, it is not Sudan that has the strongest case against Kitchener but South Africa. He set up concentration camps during the Boer war in which some 20,000 women and children died — the brutal shape of the century to come — and Guardian editorials of the time railed against him. No doubt next year the South Africans will put their case.

Righting historical wrongs has become an international obsession, but it is by no means clear what purpose is served. The Queen got into hot water when she visited India last year for not apologising for the Amritsar massacre, a diplomatic hiccup not helped by her husband saying the episode had been exaggerated. Perhaps a few honeyed words would have smoothed over a troubled visit, but the real point of contention was the immediate crisis in Kashmir.

The principal beneficiaries of these battles over the past are hard-up academics, who are invariably rolled out to pronounce on almost forgotten figures such as Kitchener. If we must apply concepts of war guilt devised to deal with the unique horrors of Nazism to all conflicts, perhaps there is a case for a committee of the global great and good to consider individual cases. Cortés and Columbus, Attila the Hun and Vlad the Impaler, Genghis Khan and General Custer. The list will be long, the arguments heated. They might get round to Kitchener in time for the bicentenary of Omdurman.

Letters to the Editor

Stumped by cricket claims

TIM Lamb's shrill cry that the accusation of subconscious racism "is a disgraceful slur" on cricket is depressing. He should read Devon Malcolm's account of his experience at the hands of England's management, talk to the Yorkshire Asian communities forced to organise their own clubs and leagues or stand on Headingley's Western Terrace when an Indian or Pakistani fielder is on the boundary.
Niru Ratnam.
London.

MARK Lawson's comparison of Muralitharan with a victim of Tourette's Syndrome is unfortunate (Bowled over by excuses, September 3). Jim Eisenreich, a lifelong sufferer, is still scoring base hits for the Florida Marlins in Major League Baseball at 38.
Tony Smith.
Newcastle, Staffs
London.

LAWSON should read the rules of cricket. There is nothing that says a bowler cannot have his arm bent whilst bowling, merely it must not become more or less straight in the course of delivery.
Ben Sheridan.
University of Liverpool.

CHARLES Belcher (Letters, September 1) quotes Silverlink cheap fares from London to Birmingham. He fails to say that the trains are wickedly uncomfortable, often awash with uncleared rubbish and take for ever going around the Northampton loop.
Bill Hawkes.
Milton Keynes, Bucks.

TWO Eton schoolboys tell me it's time to stop mourning Princess Di. Could you find two Harrovians to tell me why I should've started in the first place?
Richard Wetherell.
London.

Trading on fear of terror

JACK Straw states the new Terrorism and Conspiracy Bill (Comment, September 2) will carry safeguards, namely "the Attorney-General's consent will be required to prosecute cases relating to overseas offences".

After the collapse of the precursor to the current bill in 1997 (a private member's bill) Doug Henderson, the former Labour Party home affairs spokesperson, stated: "The Labour front bench would have supported this bill, with certain sensible amendments." We never learnt what those amendments were — the private member's bill had required the consent of the attorney-general. No other safeguards were proposed then, nor does it seem the case now.

Many refugees believe the Government is attempting to prevent their continued political opposition to those foreign governments with whom we trade by threatening imprisonment. Perhaps leaders of oppressive regimes should simply send their opponents to the UK. We will obviously keep them out of harm's way.
Pierre Makhlouf.
Hackney Law Centre, London.

PITY the British diplomat who, in pursuit of an ethical foreign policy, seeks in future to explain to an oppressive regime the virtues of democratic governance as practised in the UK. It was difficult enough in the past explaining why the Irish problem justified the existence of the sort of permanent emergency legislation we deplored elsewhere. It will now require extreme casuistry to defend a further emergency law which is not only intrinsically at odds with our traditional views on the paramountcy of civil liberties, but which is being whipped through with a cynical disregard for the principles and procedures of parliamentary democracy.

Or have we finally decided that we are too poor (spiritually as well as materially) to afford a foreign policy based on anything more complex than expediency?
David Gladstone.
(British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka 1987-91), London.

DICTATORIAL and oppressive regimes are only ever brought down by the actions which the bill seems to want to outlaw and the movements against regimes in their own countries need the support of foreign nationals in all sorts of capacities to help them. How can Blair support America's illegal bombing raids against Sudan and Afghanistan while introducing measures to make much less innocuous actions by individuals a criminal offence?
Nick Boorer.
Seaford, Lincs.

I SUSPECT many of us who have cautiously welcomed the Government's policy on Northern Ireland, especially its hard work in helping secure the Good Friday Agreement, will be in despair at the legislation proposed in the wake of the Omagh bombing.

Injustices will occur; perceived injustices will occur frequently. And the advocates of violence — almost completely cut off from a base of public support since acceptance of the peace agreement — will find that sympathy returns their way.

Do the young politicians of New Labour not remember the disaster of internment in the early seventies, when soldiers like myself rounded up and imprisoned people because they spoke Irish, or their grandfathers took part in the 1916 Rising? That stupidity led many previously neutral people in the six counties to look at the IRA with a sympathetic eye.
Meurig Parri.
Caernarfon, Gwynedd.

A toast to Spanish sobriety

POOR Mr Birkett, so lambasted for having resigned from his post as vice-consul in Ibiza (Not raving but clowning, G2, September 1). Having just returned from a year living in Madrid and Seville, I too — despite being a 22-year-old pub-goer and occasional clubber — am weary of justifying English drinking habits and consequent behaviour to Spanish friends. I taught about 300 teenagers in a local high school and they frequently asked why we were so obsessed with drinking.

A year of drinking with Spaniards made me realise the problem. They don't. Or at least in English terms. Drinking two glasses of wine and a coffee until five in the morning in big mixed groups would shame *no one*, not even men, in Spain.

Degrees of excess obviously exist, as anywhere, but they are not glorified by endless rituals of drinking societies and games. This is not something we can consign to the yob culture, but something more pervasive to English socialising. The Spanish party hard; and, especially throughout the summer, frequently stay up until dawn. Hence their dismay at the degree of inebriation, self-abuse, and aggression we seem to need in order to stay awake for similar hours.
Sara Samaniego Phillips.
Morden, Surrey.



Spiffing tales of an Oxbridge don

RE THE Eric Griffiths affair: by concentrating on a rather sad individual with an over-inflated sense of his own intellect, you merely obscured some more important issues raised by the whole farrago (Cult of Eric, August 29, and Letters, September 1 & 2).

Firstly, Griffiths epitomises the continued dominance of the Leavisite approach to the study of literature at Cambridge at the expense of more rigorous positions, such as cultural materialism, thus reflecting the ideological conservatism of the institution.

Secondly, his handling of this applicant demonstrates that as long as admission to the university is administered by the individual colleges rather than by the appropriate subject faculty, the policy of encouraging more students from state schools is doomed.

As a student in the English faculty at Cambridge, I am all too aware of the pettiness of many tutors and would be grateful if my *name* and college were not printed.
Name and address supplied.

GRANTED that Cambridge has major problems, and being from a state school I *am* aware of them, but Eric Griffiths isn't one of them. His tutorials are the most inspiring and challenging in the English faculty. If you can't take the heat . . .
Lydia Aers.
Newnham, Cambridge.

BIG hurrah from me and my college chums for your spiffing stories about Oxbridge this week! I for one was getting pretty worried about all these ordinary people who seem to be getting into Oxford year after year. But now, with lots of lovely media types putting the word about that Eric Griffiths (big MMMWAH! for him, too) has single-handedly destroyed their chances, perhaps they won't even apply! Bravo Guardian for helping to reclaim Oxbridge for the next generation of snobs and toffs!
Toodle pip.
C Fitzgerald.
Somerville College JCR.

HOW typical that you should describe an obscure English don at a Cambridge college as "the cleverest man in England". What about our Nobel Laureates? But then, unlike Dr Griffiths, they probably didn't include a handful of minor media celebrities amongst their ex-students.
David Kemp.
Glasgow.

Surgeons list the real reason why patients are waiting

THE decision of some surgeons to maximise their private income is part of the reason for the growth in waiting lists (Comment, August 31), but not a major one.

The growth in waiting lists is a consequence of changes in work patterns of many staff, including surgeons. As a surgical house officer in 1980, I worked for a consultant with a substantial private practice. His NHS operating list frequently overran, and I remember working on routine lists in the operating theatre until 9pm. NHS staff will no longer work like this. Theatre nurses, operating department assistants, anaesthetists, surgeons, porters and many other staff groups are simply not prepared to work for nothing for four hours at the end of the day. The severe restrictions on pay imposed over the last few years have contributed to this view.

Most of the doctors in my trust work far in excess of their contracted hours without complaint. Blunderbuss attacks on all hospital doctors are not really terribly helpful.
John Coakley.
Medical director, Homerton Hospital, London.

THE argument that all would be well with lists if consultants were on site for 10 sessions a week does not stand up. I am only provided with two sessions (one day) a week for operating on in-patients. This is insufficient to clear weekly urgent additions to my list, never mind the more routine work. It is also inadequate for teaching junior surgeons. Yet there is no theatre space available and even if there were, providing the necessary anaesthetic cover, nursing staff and portering would be considered too expensive. It is a fact that the considerable delays in operating out of hours are mostly due to the lack of porters.
Philip McCahy.
Locum consultant urologist, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

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Huh, uh huh. I like it!

Bel Littlejohn



THAT'S the way — uh huh, uh huh — I like it! Yes, seventies dance fever is back — though for some of us it's never been far away. Prompted by the totally happening (help! I just can't stop using those great seventies catchphrases!) premiere of the new movie The Last Days of Disco about Studio 54, I've been reminiscing with close friends in New Labour about that extraordinary decade — the decade when so many of us not only first became politically aware but also began boogying on down to Le Freak by Chic.

That's the way — uh huh, uh huh I like it! When the dawn broke on 1970, we had all been very different. My good friend Tony Blair was just 17 years old, if you can believe it, while Jack Straw and the lovely Robin Cook were both grand old men of 24. Coming from Scotland, Tony was heavily into the Bay City Rollers: he would often wear his distinctive costume of shorty flared trousers plus braces and tartan trimming to deliver his impassioned keynote addresses to the youth section of his local Labour club. Being that little bit more mature, both Jack and Robin preferred getting their heads round the more complex sounds of Yes; to this day Jack operates on four Home Office desks simultaneously, in homage to his hero, Rick Wakeman.

But one thing was for sure. In those pre-disco days, we were all fired with a deep passion for radical change in our society. One of our key aims was to distribute full-colour posters of Che Guevara to every factory in the British Isles. At that time, I was writing a regular column in IT magazine, Marxism Lives subtitled Homage To Jimi, printed in purple on orange, so I was something of a figurehead for these bold young men — Jack, Tony, Robin — who were later to become so influential in the history of the Labour movement.

At the beginning of the 1970s, we would regularly meet behind closed doors to discuss ways to effect radical change in our society with leading socialists like Tony Benn (though I remember Jack confiding to me in the spring of 1972 that he thought Benn had completely sold out, citing his point blank refusal to play the new King Crimson concept album at a meeting of the National Executive, thus depriving the youth voice of its most valuable forum). Meanwhile, Tony Blair would sport his radical credentials by pinning CND badges on to his braces and miming Ban The Bomb to the background music of the Bay City Rollers' seminal hit, Shang-a-Lang.

SOMETIMES, I can't help but wonder where all that youthful passion went. Don't get me wrong, I beg you. I believe that the present New Labour administration is driving through some amazingly courageous and radical bills. For instance, I welcome with open arms Jack Straw's proposed legislation to force parents to ensure their children have clean fingernails at mealtimes.

But when the history of the Labour Movement comes to be written, it's my guess they'll see the period from the end of 1977 to the beginning of 1978 as a major turning-point, for it was at precisely this time that the Bee Gees recorded their historic soundtrack to Saturday Night Fever.

I'll never forget the day disco-fever hit Jack Straw. Jack was 31 years old, and with his distinctive thick-rimmed spectacles beneath a still-youthful Afro-cut hairdo, he used to spend his days in jeans and tie-dye T-shirt hawking copies of INK magazine on the corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road. But overnight in February 1978, that all changed. Clad in a white suit with a gold medallion and blow-dried hair, he could be spotted sashaying nightly from dance-floor to dance-floor singing, "Uh-huh-huh-huh-Stayin' Alllliive!" at the top of his voice.

Meanwhile, Robin Cook had combed his hair in such a way as to ensure he was regularly mistaken for top Bee Gee, Maurice Gibb, and Tony Blair, now a mature 25, had cast aside his tartan-rimmed flares for the more glittery, figure-hugging attire of KC and The Sunshine Band. And following Bianca Jagger's celebrated entrance into Studio 54 naked on a white horse, Margaret Beckett was to enter the Derby South Labour Club on a donkey, clad in little more than a two-piece polyester-mix suit from Debenhams and a pair of sensible shoes.

Yes, the Labour Party had begun the slow process of re-inventing itself. By 1997 the risk had paid off, and the New Labour Disco Party was in government. But perhaps somewhere along the line we've lost a little of our original passion for the entire restructuring of the global economy, and sometimes I think that's a bit of a shame.

هكذا من الأصل

Jonathan Mann

The rights of health



Passionate advocate . . . Jonathan Mann addressing the 1988 Aids conference in London PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN ARGLES

JONATHAN Mann, who died in the Swissair crash off the coast of Nova Scotia at the age of 51, was a passionate visionary and charismatic leader in the global response to Aids. He and his wife, Mary-Lou Clements-Mann, were on their way to Geneva to attend a series of World Health Organisation and UNAIDS meetings on Aids.

Jonathan was founding director of the Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health, where he had worked since resigning as head of the Aids programme at the World Health Organisation in 1990. He was proof that a single individual can make an enormous historic contribution — in this case to the field of international public health. Jonathan saw the inextricable link between health and human rights and zealously advocated the need to develop a commensurate response, which went beyond the bio-medical dimensions of the virus.

Using his forceful oratorical skills and strong data, he turned global attention to the roots of public health, arguing that addressing social vulnerabilities is key to any strategic health response. By recognising that we needed to deal with the social and political dimensions of Aids, if we were to make any dent on the epidemic, he laid the foundations for an expanded response to Aids. And he did this when few were bold enough to swim against the tide.

He was born in Boston, the son of a psychiatrist and a social worker. He graduated from Harvard in history, before gaining medical qualifications from Washington University, St Louis. His first job was with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. I remember meeting him for the first time in Antwerp, in 1984, when he was on his way to Kinshasa. There we worked together in Project Sida, the first Aids research project in Africa, of which he was director and founder. This meeting grew into a long association. We did not always agree on issues related to public health and it was not until much later, in fact, that I realised how much I had learned from him.

When I was considering the position of executive director of the joint UN programme on HIV/Aids (UNAIDS), which I currently occupy, I called him for his advice. When he took the historical step of resigning from the directorship of WHO's global programme on Aids, he called me up in Antwerp to let me know. For me he always remained a friend.

As the founder-head of the WHO's first global programme on Aids (1986-90), he led the first global response to the epidemic. For the first time in the history of public health, there was a true dialogue with countries and individuals in developing a response to the epidemic, rather than a top-down approach. Under his tenure he tripled his programme's budget to £70 million.

In 1988, in London, under Jonathan's inspired leadership, the largest meeting of ministers of health in history — with 117 representatitives from around the globe — came together to address the epidemic. A bold leader, he made a health issue into a political issue, and rightly so, raising it even at the UN general assembly.

Like many passionate advocates of difficult causes, he was not without controversy. He left WHO in dramatic circumstances — born of disagreements with the director-general, Hiroshi Nakajima. I was shocked by his resignation but knew that he would remain in the fight against the epidemic. And he did.

He was never afraid to tackle difficult issues in the cause of Aids, and at times that meant confronting working partners, institutions and governments. Recently, an example of his impatience was his accusation of the failure to produce a vaccine against HIV as being an infringement of human rights. At times he could be stubborn and carry his idealism to lengths that exasperated some. But he never lost his enthusiasm and conviction over the issues he believed in. In a time of disillusionment among the Aids community, he turned his tireless energy to championing the cause of vaccine development for the third world.

Many young workers in the field and in Geneva were inspired and encouraged by the tireless energy that he brought with him. We lament the loss to the field of Aids, and of a good friend. He leaves his former wife, Marie-Paule, his children Naomi, Lydia and Aaron, and the family of Mary-Lou, who died with him.

Friend, I hope that you are out there somewhere doing what you were best at — telling them like it is. We will miss you.

Peter Piot

Sir Donald Acheson, former Chief Medical Officer, adds: I have a very clear recollection of Jonathan Mann as a partner in the work done internationally to control the HIV/Aids epidemic in the 1980s. Jonathan was the principal official at the WHO when the epidemic was breaking and the picture of a global pandemic was begin to emerge. He was an inspirational figure, rapidly building up a team in Geneva which unquestionably had a profound influence on informing and educating. He believed it was essential to tell the truth about exactly how the virus was spread, and not spread.

He had an extraordinary energy and charisma in addition to being a highly-trained professional. I last saw him two years ago when he was giving an address at the London Lighthouse. His capacity to transmit a message and inspire people was undiminished. By then, he had shifted his priorities from science into human rights and had become almost a prophetic figure. He had not taken all scientists with him. But he had crossed the river. His views on human rights and Aids had brought into focus all sorts of latent types of prejudice about homosexuality, gender, race and poverty. He saw Aids as a disease specifically rooted in poverty and prejudice, believing that it only flourished where there is prejudice, poverty and ignorance. The latter we can more easily deal with, but it is poverty, and most of all prejudice that must be abandoned.

Dr Seth Berkley, president of the International Aids Vaccine Initative adds: I first met Jonathan in the mid 1980s when he was working in Zaire on the first Aids project in Africa. One of the most important things about him was that he lived the epidemic — from working out how to deal with the epidemic to a personal journey into human rights' issues surrounding Aids. Together with his wife Mary-Lou Clements-Mann, a distinguished vaccine researcher, he became a passionate advocate for the development of an Aids vaccine.

He sensed the need to develop human rights and prevention strategies and, at the same time, a need for a vaccine that could be used by — and would be available to — everyone. He was a pioneering figure in drawing attention to the fact that those affected by Aids were "vulnerable populations": the poor, the dispossessed, women and those stigmatised by society such as gay people.

A passionate and caring man, he spoke from his heart. A powerful speaker, he would talk of the tragedies played out in the Aids epidemic. People would listen to him speak and be so moved that they had the feeling they had had an evangelical experience.

Jonathan Mann, epidemiologist, born July 30, 1947; died September 2, 1998

Sir Alastair Dunnett

Scotland's 'man o' pairts'

ALASTAIR Dunnett, the former editor of the Scotsman who has died aged 89, was the most successful Scottish newspaper editor of his generation. He was also a good example of a paradox that lies at the heart of the Scottish character: the reputations of the Scots for dourness, reserve and suspicion but also for good humour, outgoing hospitality and friendliness.

Dunnett turned the Scotsman into a truly national newspaper, the authentic voice of North Britain. It reflected a healthy, broad-minded parochialism with space for all aspects of Scottish opinion and good coverage of international news. Under his editorship the Scotsman became the only British newspaper other than the Times that was on display at every British embassy.

As a young man he started his own paper, the Claymore Press, for Scottish lads, rivalling the Boy's Own paper and other publications aimed at nine-to-13-year-olds. It survived just one year (1933-34). He then went to the Glasgow Weekly Herald, left it for the Bulletin, left that for the Daily Record, a popular tabloid where he was an all-round journalist from 1937, and in 1940 became chief press officer to the Secretary of State for Scotland — until 1946, when he returned to the Daily Record as editor. After nine years there he moved to be editor of the Scotsman from 1956-72.

The years of Dunnett's editorship saw great change in Scottish life: the growth of tourism; the advent of skiing, which more than anything else brought a sharp decline in Scottish sabbatharianism; the flourishing of culture and the arts. Dunnett expanded the Scotsman's arts coverage, especially in its Saturday edition, and attracted open-minded, adventurous writers and critics.

Ronald (Bingo) Mavor, son of Bridle the playwright, covered drama. The poet Sydney Goodsir Smith was art critic. W H C Watson and later Christopher MacLehose were literary editor. Magnus Magnusson, Neil Ascherson and Allen Wright were features and arts writers, and the brilliant artist Coia was cartoonist. Many went on to other careers in their fields. Letters columns were extensive and avidly read, on every topic from the most intellectual to the state of civic drains.

Edinburgh, where the Scotsman is published, has always been a battlefield between progressive and revolutionary views and life-styles, between popular prejudice and enlightened or pompous erudition.

The rise of the Scottish National Party, once a largely academic and literary movement, to become a political force made Dunnett's years as editor an exciting but trying time. He also had to cope with a foreign-based proprietor, Lord Thomson, and a chief executive, James Coltart, heavily committed to the puritanical Moral Rearmament, strong in Scotland and totally philistine.

Dunnett maintained a balance. No one could be quite sure what the newspaper's political position was. The 1964 Labour government, with Jenny Lee herself a Scot as Britain's most Maecenas-like arts minister, breathed life into the Scottish arts, especially theatre and music, and they expanded rapidly. The Scotsman gave generous recognition to all the new artistic activities, however controversial, while still carrying contrary and puritanical voices in the letters columns.

I was grateful for the Scotsman's support over the two public literary conferences that I organised for the Edinburgh Festival in 1962 and 1963. Both conferences were attacked by some elements of the Church of Scotland, by MRA and by others who objected to the suspect novelty of uninhibited public debate. Though popular and successful, a privately instigated prosecution led to their suppression, even though the case of the "festival nude" (a demonstration of what the future of the theatre might be like in Britain's first-ever "happening") was thrown out of court by the magistrate.

Another memorable Dunnett decision was when I had been invited to speak at the Church of Scotland General Assembly on their youth night in 1967. Pressure from MRA led to a General Assembly vote the day before I was supposed to speak to cancel the invitation.

DUNNETT offered to print my entire address the next morning in the Scotsman: it covered half the front page and nearly three inside pages. In fact it was not at all what I would have said in a short speech, but instead was an analytical attack on censorship. Dunnett was delighted and gave me an expensive lunch, praising the article extravagantly and commenting on the many Scottish references and quotations with which I had peppered the "speech."

It was exactly the kind of controversy, exposing cant and hypocrisy, that Dunnett loved. His correspondence columns buzzed for months and I received innumerable invitations to speak to Church of Scotland youth groups during the following two years.

In 1972, to the regret of many, Dunnett was transferred by Lord Thomson to Aberdeen to become chairman of Thomson Scottish Petroleum, and he also joined the boards of several national companies in the same group. His position in the financial and commercial world was thereby enhanced, but not his influence on opinion.

Although retaining a home in Edinburgh — and, as he liked to point out in his speeches, still using his Glasgow tailor and club — he had to spend most of his time in Aberdeen when running the Thomson oil interests. His wife Dorothy, a bestselling author of historical novels, was a lively companion to her outwardly slightly dour, but inwardly warm and often mischievous husband. They had two sons.

Alastair Dunnett was always involved in a wide range of activities to do with the press, the arts, and public affairs in Scotland. He was a director of Scottish Television, a governor of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre, a member (1959-62) of the Press Council, and of the Scottish International Educational Trust, Scottish Theatre Ballet and, in both cases from 1962 to 1970, of the Scottish Tourist Board and the National Trust for Scotland. His presence on these bodies was never ornamental: he imposed his authority and originality on every meeting he attended. Knighted in 1995, he was indeed "a man o' pairts."

Born in Kilmacolm in Ayrshire he was educated at Hillhead High School in Glasgow and started work at 17 as a clerk at the Commercial Bank of Scotland, leaving there to start his Claymore Press venture. His autobiography *Any Friends* appeared in 1984, but he wrote many other books including *Treasure at Sonnach* (1935), *No Thanks to the Duke* (1978), and a number of plays and short stories. Although a hard worker, he found time for sailing, walking and much reading.

John Calder

Alastair MacTavish Dunnett, editor, born December 26, 1908; died September 2, 1998



Dunnett . . . made the Scotsman a truly national newspaper

Letter

John Torode writes: Sir Gordon Newton (*obituary September 3*) was a wonderful editor but he was rightly very demanding of the "bright young men" he recruited from Oxbridge. In my case I was hired as labour reporter in 1965, never having worked on a newspaper in my life. I still recall his morning descents on the labour room. Other executives would ask why I had missed a particular story. I could always stammer out an excuse of sorts. Sir Gordon would simply ask: "Why were we not best today?" There was no answer to that.

As well as being demanding, he was deeply cautious, hesitant about using scoops brought to him by inexperienced whippersnappers such as me, in case they proved to be wrong and damaging to the FT. He would rather miss an exclusive than have to apologise for it the next day.

Eventually I found what I thought was a cunning way round this reasonable caution. Sir Gordon regarded the Daily Telegraph as his most serious rival. So when I took an exclusive to him I would add sorrowfully: "I'm afraid the Telegraph might be on to this, too, Sir." Faced by the possibility of being upstaged by his rival, he would brush caution aside and run the story. The next morning when he came into the labour room he would mutter, deadpan: "Lucky the Telegraph missed that one, eh?" I was never quite certain who was fooling whom.

Birthdays

Joan Aiken, novelist, children's poet and playwright, 74; **Prof Anthony Atkinson**, warden, Nuffield College, Oxford, 54; **Dave Bassett**, football manager, 54; **Ann Burdus**, business executive, 65; **Sir Michael Day**, former chairman, Commission for Racial Equality, 65; **Raymond Floyd**, golfer, 56; **Mike Gapes**, Labour MP, 48; **Mitzi Gaynor**, actress and dancer, 68; **Sir Nicholas Jackson**, organist, harpsichordist and composer, 64; **Bill Kenwright**, theatrical impresario, 53; **Bireli Lagrene**, jazz guitarist, 32; **Dinsdale Landen**, actor, 68; **Michael Stean**, chess grandmaster, 45; **Tom Watson**, golfer, 49; **Enid Wistrich**, reader in public administration, Middlesex University, 70.

Jackie Blanchflower

A career cut short

JACKIE Blanchflower, who has died of cancer aged 65, spent most of his 25th birthday asleep in a hospital bed in Munich. Cheerful nuns and nurses woke him to sing *Happy Birthday*. It was hardly that, though he was touched by the gesture. A month earlier, on February 6, 1958, Blanchflower had been one of the seriously injured survivors of the air crash which killed eight Manchester United players on their way back from a European Cup match against Red Star Belgrade.

Jackie, the team's elegant, adventurous centre half, and Northern Ireland's too, had suffered a broken right arm, which would give him pain for a long while to come, and a fractured pelvis. Those injuries forced him to retire from the game, and he never played again. But he took up a career in accountancy, and was a popular after-dinner speaker. Just two weeks ago he attended a memorial match at Old Trafford which raised funds for crash survivors.

It is slightly ironic he should outlive by several years his older brother, Danny, whose career overshadowed his own. As right half and captain of Spurs and Northern Ireland, Danny was outstanding among the players of his day, not only a skilful footballer but an eloquent one too, writing columns for, among others, the New Statesman.

But no one was more aware than Danny of his younger brother's virtues, nor more disappointed that Jackie's significant presence was denied the Northern Ireland team which, four months after Munich, was due to figure for the first time in the World Cup finals in Sweden.

The loss of Jackie, Danny observed, meant that Northern Ireland's tactics were radically affected. Jackie, a "football-ing" centre half, clever on the ball and constructive in his use of it, was self-reliant enough to allow Danny, the team's right half, to play well upfield, largely in a creative role. With Jackie gone, and a full back put into the centre half position to fill the breach, Danny was obliged to play a much more cautious and protective role.



Blanchflower . . . never played after the Munich crash

Danny had also been full of praise for his brother's versatile performance in the 1958 FA Cup Final at Wembley, for Manchester United against Aston Villa, when United's goalkeeper, Ray Wood, was injured and forced to play most of the match bobbling on the wing.

Jackie went into goal, and performed with great agility and aplomb. Not only did he save shots, all but two, but, as Danny emphasised, his use of the ball when he had it, always throwing it to a team mate rather than belting it upfield, was exemplary.

Born in Belfast, Jackie joined United as a wing half and operated for a time as an inside forward. But his one failing, a lack of pace, led to his dropping back, in due course, to centre half.

In 1954 he made his debut for Northern Ireland against Wales, going on to win a dozen caps. At United he had a rival for the centre half position in Mark Jones, a solid and more orthodox defender who, alas, perished at Munich. Blanchflower, however, was just as dominant in the air, and a good deal more resourceful on the ground.

Besides his role in United's early European Cup adventures, Blanchflower won a League Championship medal with them in season 1955/56.

He is survived by his wife, Jean.

Brian Glanville

Jackie Blanchflower, footballer, born March 7, 1933; died September 2, 1998

Death Notices

CAMPBELL. Simon Fraser, born 10th May 1916, Kinlochlevon, died 2nd September 1998, Malaga. A kind liberal father, proud Scottish Highlander, handsome RAS veteran and loyal public servant. Leaves two sons, Simon and Ian, grandson James and loving wife Jane.

COLLINGWOOD. Vera, peacefully after a short illness on 1st September aged 77. Much loved by family and friends in England and Italy. No flowers please. Funeral at St. Anne's, Kew Green at 11.15am on Friday 11th September.

HEBDEN. Rosemary, died on the 30th August 1998. The funeral will take place at Grantham Crematorium on Wednesday 9th September at 2.00pm. No flowers, donations to Help the Aged, c/o William Roberts & Sons, Funeral Directors, Dawon Lane, Bottesford, Nottingham, NG13 0BZ or to a charity of your choice.

LONGTHORNE. Nelly, on 31st August, in hospital. Beloved wife of Brian, adored Mummy of Ruth and Rupert, Mark and Maggie and cherished Grandma to Max, Ned, Harry, Emily and Josie. Funeral service at St Paul's Church, Winchester on Tuesday 8th September at 2.00pm. Donations if desired, to the N.S.P.C.C. c/o Jno Steel & Son, Chesil House, Winchester.

JONES. Sandra, 31 August 1998. Free at last! No more sharp acrasheel An exceptional, inspirational friend, wife and mother. Funeral service to take place at Reading Crematorium, All Hallows Road, on Tuesday 8th September at 13.30 and afterwards at the family home. Flowers to Co-operative Funeral Service, 572 Wokingham Rd, Earley, Reading, RG6 7JD or donations to any cancer charity

■To place your announcement telephone 0171 713 4567 or fax 0171 713 4707 between 9am and 3pm Mon-Fri.

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

PARKING for Charlton: In our pre-football season supplement, The Season, published a few weeks ago, using information supplied to us, we gave the impression that there was ample parking in the streets around Charlton Athletic's ground, The Valley. The Metropolitan Police say this is now not the case and they advise those going to matches at The Valley not to take their cars but to use public transport: Charlton station (trains from London Bridge or Charing Cross), or 177 and 188 buses.

A PHOTOGRAPH on Page 25 yesterday was said to show David Byas at the crease in Yorkshire's game with Surrey. It wasn't Byas who (as several readers point out) is left-handed. The picture was supplied to us wrongly captioned. We don't know who the batsmen is.

OUR REPORT of the results of a survey to find the most hated pop song, Page 6, August 29, wrongly dated the winner — *Barbie Girl* — 1998. We should have said 1997. We misquoted its best-known line as "Come on Ken, let's go party!" That should have been "Come on Barbie, let's go party!" We also mistakenly said that *The Birdie Song* by The Tweets topped the charts for 23 weeks. Although it was in the charts for 23 weeks, it never reached the very top. Number Two was as far as it got.

IN AN ARTICLE on Page 2, Society, September 2, we said, "The Royal College of Radiologists has failed to prevent numerous cancer screening errors." We should have said the Royal College of Pathologists.

It is the policy of the Guardian to correct errors as soon as possible. Please quote date and page number. Readers may contact the office of the Readers' Editor by telephoning 0171 239 9589 between 11am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Surface mail to Readers' Editor, The Guardian, 119, Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER. Fax: 0171 239 9897. E-mail: reader@guardian.co.uk

A Country Diary

NORTHUMBERLAND: A wet summer has allowed the garden to take off. The lawn is throwing up new spikes of green and weeds are getting ahead of the plants. I remember my mother in this garden in a shady hat, snipping the odd dead head. A gardener lurked in the background. The structure of living has changed in today's world and we who live in the country undertake tasks that would, 50 years ago, have been unthinkable. I try to cram a week's gardening into a day, with the result that I develop fatigued muscles and a bad back. Half the fault is mine; I still foolishly use ancient tools, blunt spades, secateurs, fork and hoe, edging shears that will not cut. I know not how to sharpen them and resent the threat of throwing old friends away and buying new. The tools are partly ineffectual because they do not fit — nobody plays golf with clubs which are too long or too short. The potting shed is a minefield. Children's clobber, garden furniture, deceased barrows, junk creating a maze waiting to trip me. The pull-start mower is the real back-killer, a forward bend followed by a backward twist is lethal. My husband has opted out, so we have a village worthy mowing this year and he has been worth every penny. As senior gardener I have developed a philosophical attitude, dig for a spell, then change to another task, preferably one where I reach up so that muscles refuel and recover. Or I take a break and contemplate hard work. I lean on my spade to chat to our house martins or a passing robin.

VERONICA HEATH

هكذا من الاصل

Shares turmoil spills into currencies

Investors flee for safety

Larry Elliott
Economics Editor

SHARE prices in London last night plunged to their lowest level this year as the deepening crisis in Russia and fears of a global financial contagion sent investors fleeing from equities into the safe havens of cash, government bonds and the German mark.

With markets around the world unsettled by Moscow's decision to allow the rouble to go into freefall on the foreign exchanges, the FTSE 100 index dropped 117.1 points to 5118.7 at the close of business in the City.

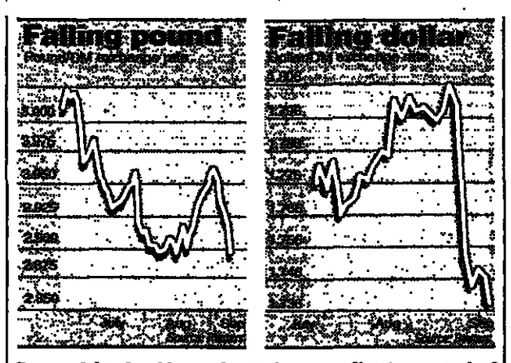
Turmoil in the equity markets spilled over into the foreign exchanges, where the sell-off on Wall Street undermined the dollar and boosted the Japanese yen and the German mark. In Moscow, the rouble's value fell from 12.82 to the dollar to 16.9, with the three-day forward rate standing at 30 to the dollar.

Sterling fell by almost three pfennings against the German mark to 2.8958 — its fifth consecutive fall — amid growing signs that the UK economy is heading for a rapid slowdown.

After reporting earlier this week that manufacturing remained gripped by recession, the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply said yesterday that activity in the service sector — until now the driving force behind growth — weakened markedly in August.

The CIPS Purchasing Managers Index found that services were still growing last month but at the slowest rate since the survey began in July 1996.

"We are now seeing the first real hard evidence that the impact of the strong pound, interest rates and increasing uncertainty in the global economic environment are affecting not only domestic manufacturing, but also the service sector," said Peter Thomson, director-general of the CIPS.



However, despite Mr Thomson's gloomy message, City economists are unanimous in their belief that the Bank of England's monetary policy committee will leave interest rates on hold at 7.5 per cent when it meets next week.

Gerard Lyons, chief economist with Japanese bank DKB, said: "The markets are very vulnerable to any bad news. People are now much more aware of problems that they should have been aware of three to six months ago".

Mr Lyons added that it was likely that New York's Dow Jones index would head lower in "a zig-zag fashion", denting optimism about the US economy and the dollar. Over the past couple of years, the hot money flooding into Wall Street has underpinned not only the stock market but also the US currency.

The Dow's wild gyrations this week continued yesterday, with the 500-point fall on Monday and the near 300-point recovery on Tuesday followed by a drop of more than 100 points during morning trading in New York.

The dollar was two pfennigs down against the mark at around 1.73, compared with more than 1.80 a week ago. Analysts believe the falling dollar threatens growth prospects in Europe, Japan and the rest of Asia.

Markets were again affected by the news coming out of Russia, with share prices in Brazil down by 5 per cent amid concerns that the contagion could spread to Latin America.

Graham Turner, economist at the Tokai Bank Europe in London, said it was unlikely that shares would see the same sort of dramatic falls as in October 1987, but predicted that the Dow could fall gradually by a further 2,500 points during the next 18 months before the bear market was over.

"At that level US shares would be fairly priced," he added.

Hitachi admits record loss of 250bn yen

Jonathan Watts in Tokyo

HITACHI yesterday announced that it will post a net group loss of 250 billion yen (£1.04 billion) for the current financial year — its first slide into the red since 1947 — underlining the desperate circumstances facing Japan's manufacturing industry.

Japan's largest electrical machinery maker was predicting a profit of 40 billion yen as recently as three months ago.

"This is the worst crisis in the history of the company," said Hitachi president Tsutomu Kanai. "We plan to weed out all unprofitable activities in the current business year so we can make a fresh start next year."

The company blamed the global slump in semiconductor prices and falling domestic sales of personal computer equipment. Hitachi, which relies on the Japanese market for 70 per cent of its revenue, has been particularly hard hit by the nation's worst recession since the second world war. Figures released yesterday showed household spending in July down 3.4 per cent from a year earlier.

Hitachi said it will reduce its fixed costs by 10 per cent by April 1999 through the loss of 4,000 jobs among its 70,000 workforce, a freeze on capital spending and the consolidation of its eight electric power affiliates into four firms. Earlier in the week, it also announced plans to pare down drastically its semiconductor operations in the United States. A company official said the restructuring plan would result in an extraordinary loss of 160 billion yen.

Sceptics doubted this would be enough. Moody's Investors Service put Hitachi's credit ratings on review for a possible downgrade. The stock price plunged almost 15 per cent.

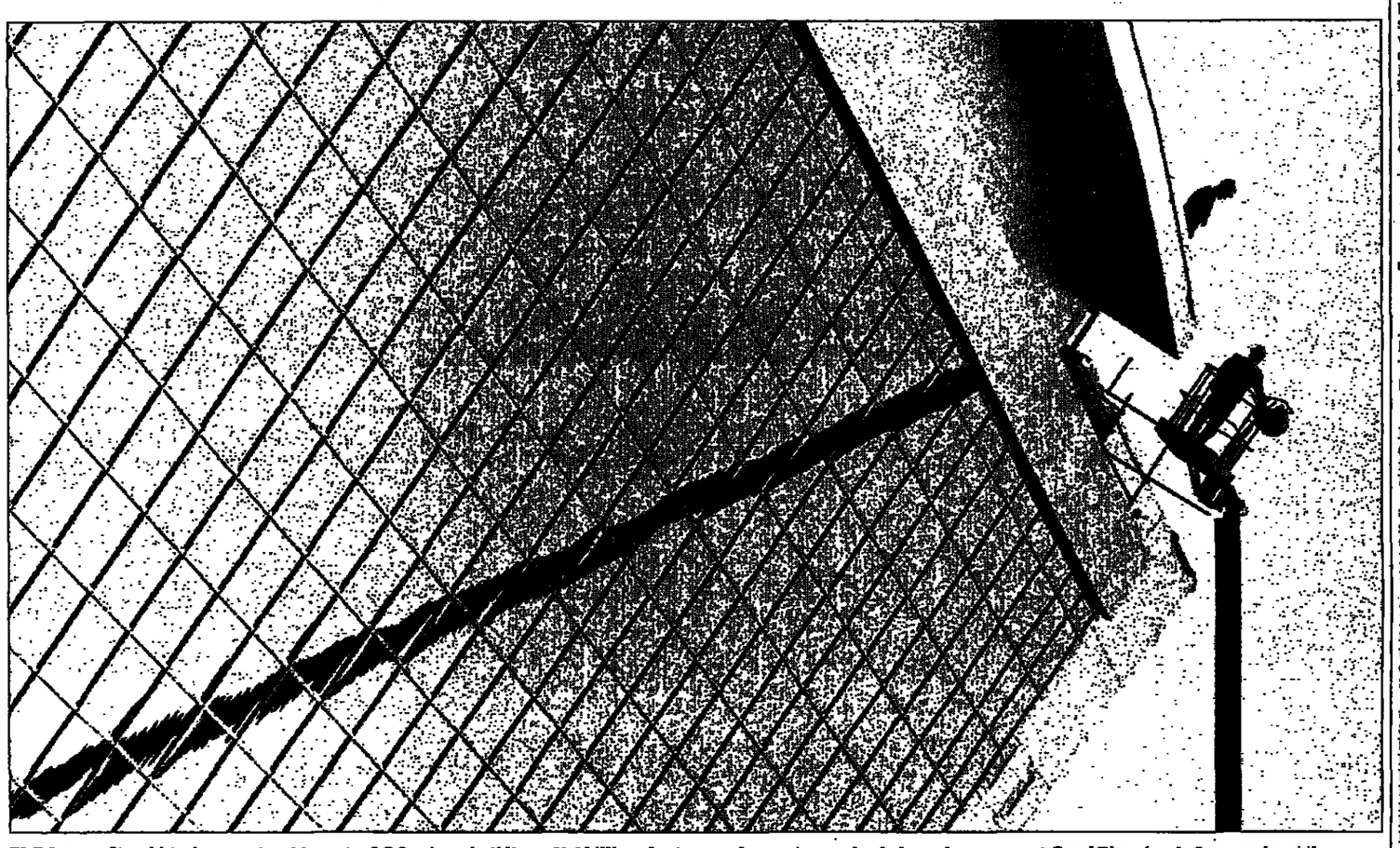
Fears that other corporations will make similar downward revisions of earnings forecasts helped to push the Nikkei index of the Tokyo Stock Exchange down by 115 points, its first fall in four days.

Today Toa Steel Corporation is set to formally announce that it is folding with liabilities of 280 billion yen.

Analysts attributed the failure — one of the largest in the manufacturing sector since the war — to a sharp fall in office and house building, which has pushed steel production down to its lowest level in almost three decades.

Most of Toa's operations will be taken over by its main shareholder, NKK Corp, the nation's second largest producer of crude steel.

South Korean merger threatens future jobs at computer chip plants



THE future of two hi-tech computer chip plants in South Wales and Scotland, once expected to employ about 3,500 people, was threatened yesterday when their South Korean owners announced they were merging, *write Nicholas Bannister and Gerard Seenan.*

LG Semicon, building a £1.2 billion plant at Newport, Gwent, (above) is merging with Hyundai Electronics which has built — and mothballed — a semi-conductor plant at Dunfermline, Fife. The merger was one of the restructuring moves announced yesterday by South Korea's leading conglomerates, or chaebols, under pressure to streamline operations from their government and the International Monetary Fund. The restructuring was triggered by the chaebols' need to reduce debts built up during years of diversification and expansion. Professor Garel Rhys, head of economics at the Cardiff University Business School, said the future of the Welsh plant was crucial to the South Wales economy, but added: "This is a Korean decision and it will be made for the best interests of the Korean economy."

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF MORGAN

US hedge fund takes $2bn hit

Mark Tran in New York

THE powerful American hedge fund Long-Term Capital has reported a loss of $2.1 billion (£1.29 billion) in August, wiping out 44 per cent of its asset base.

"Losses of this magnitude are a shock to us as they are surely to you," Long-Term Capital's founder, John Meriwether, said in a letter to investors.

Mr Meriwether was a vice-chairman at Salomon Brothers but left after the firm was hit by the 1991 US treasury bond trading scandal, taking with him some of Salomon's best brains.

Long-Term Capital is in distinguished company. George Soros's Quantum Fund lost $2 billion from its investment in Russia and several big US banks, including Chase Manhattan, J.P. Morgan and Salomon Smith Barney, have lost hundreds of millions of dollars because of recent market upheavals.

According to Hedge/Mar, a New York publishing firm specialising in hedge funds, preliminary results from 155 hedge funds suggest that roughly three-quarters lost money in August. About 42 funds had losses exceeding 10 per cent.

Long-Term Capital had been racking up annual gains of more than 50 per cent for wealthy investors since it was founded in 1994. It came unstuck in late August as investors, seeking safe havens as markets tumbled, shifted into more conservative US treasury bonds.

As those investors fled, the value of esoteric instruments held by Long-Term plummeted. Most of those losses did not come from Russian bonds. The firm's position included US and Danish mortgage securities that tumbled even as prices of US and other government bonds soared.

Long-Term had banked on gains from mortgage securities and falling treasury bond prices, but lost both bets.

It said last year that investment opportunities were not sufficiently attractive and returned about $2.7 billion in capital to investors. "We expected that sooner or later this good fortune could not continue uninterrupted and that we as a firm would be tested," Mr Meriwether told investors. "I did not anticipate, however, how severe the test would be."

Shell and Texaco merge European businesses

Nicholas Bannister, Chief Business Correspondent

SHELL and Texaco announced plans yesterday to merge their European oil refining and petrol station businesses in an attempt to cut costs as the industry struggles to cope with the lowest oil price for a decade.

BP, Shell's main UK rival, set up a similar European joint venture with another US oil company, Mobil, in 1996 before going on to make a surprise, £32 billion, agreed bid last month for Amoco, the fourth-largest US oil company.

The Petrol Retailers Association said the Shell/Texaco deal signalled further job losses and forecourt closures across Europe and particularly in the UK.

"With 1,459 Shell and 1,065 Texaco branded outlets in the UK, it is obvious that downsizing and rationalisation will rapidly become the language to emerge from this alliance," said PRA chief executive Christopher MacGowan. Rural petrol stations would be the most threatened, he claimed.

Shell, the world's largest publicly traded oil group, denied reports that it was planning to mount a full bid for Texaco, the seventh largest.

Under the outline deal announced yesterday, Shell would own 88 per cent and Texaco 12 per cent of the new multi-billion pound European venture. The deal will bring together Shell's 17 European refineries and 12,954 petrol stations with Texaco's two refineries and 2,984 petrol stations.

Both companies have worked together before. They have two joint ventures in the United States and are partners in exploration projects.

A Shell spokeswoman said the combined European operations were expected to generate pre-tax cost savings of about $200 million (£120 million) a year.

● British oil exploration and production company Enterprise Oil yesterday said that it could not count on higher oil prices "in the foreseeable future". Enterprise's first half operating profits slumped from £156.7 million to £12 million, though the overall result was boosted by a £39.2 million one-off gain on the sale of oil and gas assets.

News in brief

BAT allowed to split tobacco and finance

A HIGH Court judge yesterday cleared BAT Industries' plan to split its tobacco and financial services arms, saying objections by plaintiffs engaged in legal action in the United States were not the "primary" concern of the court.

Lawyers representing 48 Blue Cross and Blue Shield health plans in the US had argued they would lose out if the new smaller tobacco company could not pay the cost of treating smokers if it lost any key legal actions. — *Bloomberg*

Oftel reorganises

THE telecoms regulator Oftel unveiled wide-ranging reforms yesterday, abolishing its civil service branches and replacing them with two main divisions.

The changes, ordered by director general David Edmonds, aim to make the watchdog better able to both monitor the telecoms industry's compliance with regulations and to introduce new rules. Mr Edmonds said Oftel lawyers, accountants and managers would be able to work more closely. — *Chris Barrie*

BA deal attacked

CONTINENTAL Airlines Holdings yesterday filed complaints with the Office of Fair Trading and the European Commission against the proposed alliance of British Airways and American Airlines. Its chairman Gordon Bethune said the pact would amount to a de-facto merger and would be prejudicial to competition and consumers' interests. — *Extel*

Minimum wage 'no threat'

A NATIONAL minimum wage need not have a significant effect on jobs, according to a study of statutory pay rates published yesterday. The research, by the Office for National Statistics, also concluded that a minimum wage set at a sensible level need not have a knock-on effect on higher wage rates.

Marley in buy-back

MARLEY, the building materials company, is to buy back a seventh of its stock for £39.7 million after reporting that strong US demand had pushed first-half profits up by 9 per cent. The company will split its existing shares in two, then give shareholders the option to sell it back the B shares priced at 11.7p. — *Bloomberg*

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 2.80	Germany 2.8415	Malaysia 6.978	Singapore 2.84
Austria 19.93	Greece 486.93	Malta 0.63	South Africa 10 08
Belgium 58.67	Hong Kong 12.61	Netherlands 3.1976	Spain 240.15
Canada 2.517	India 71.357	New Zealand 3.23	Sweden 12.92
Cyprus 0.83	Ireland 1.1238	Norway 12.61	Switzerland 2.34
Denmark 10.88	Israel 6.439	Portugal 285.23	Turkey 448,980
Finland 8.729	Italy 2,819	Saudi Arabia 6.17	USA 1.6293
France 9.4966			

Supplied by NatWest (excluding rupee, shekel and dollar)

'Jobs for life' go in C&A cuts

Roger Cowe

A SHAKE-UP of the privately-owned C&A store group will cost more than 400 jobs across Europe, including 230 in the UK and 110 in Germany.

The company announced yesterday that it is to close six UK stores, employing a total of almost 150 staff, while more than 80 managers will go in a reorganisation aimed at modernising the group's trading practices. The stores are in Blackburn, Salisbury, Shrewsbury, Southport and Walsall, in addition to Birkenhead, whose closure was announced 18 months ago.

A spokesman for C&A said the company aimed to stop trading at these unprofitable sites early in the new year, but would continue trading if no offers for the sites had been received by then.

He said the management redundancies stemmed from an 18-month review aimed at introducing a modern retailing structure.

"It is a total and utter change of culture," he said. "This has been a very paternalistic company where you had a job for life if you kept your nose clean. But now each person must provide added value. We are going to take a more robust attitude to underperformance in both stores and individuals."

The shake-up stems from the introduction two years ago of non-family directors, which led to a review of the management structure and a modernisation of business practices.

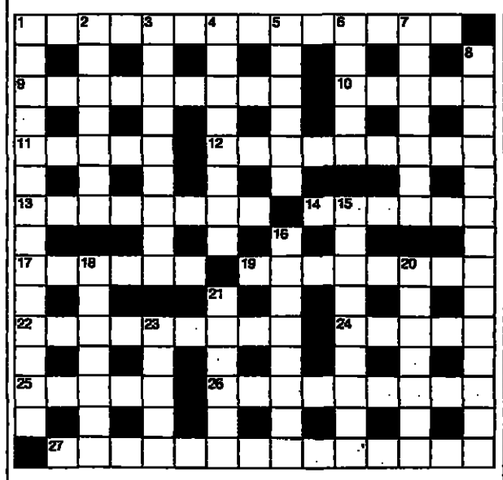
"In our heyday we were the quickest mover on the high street," the spokesman said. "But we have become very bureaucratic, which makes it difficult to move quickly."

The new approach copies brand management techniques used in other retail chains, including a focus on fewer brands more closely targeted on key customer groups. C&A has also streamlined its operational management structure, with fewer areas and regions on top of its 119 stores.

The number of suppliers has been slashed from about 7,000 to 1,500.

Guardian Crossword No 21,371

Set by Araucaria

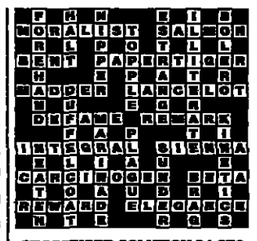


Across

1 Minute full of inferences (14)
9 Strange creature in a river, crazy and sick with love (9)
10 Gold that's authentic turns black (5)
11 Bear that is pointed to by big one (5)
12 Scenes with law-breaker reveal a good king (9)
13 Died having got old, about a hundred, being in the way (8)
14 Poems on South African port (8)
17 No way this chap outside the firm can be facetious (6)
19 Died to drink, born to eat — a bit of a roll (8)
22 Language with a thin end? (9)
24 City of the inconclusive mathematician (5)
25 Musical ending to Fellini's film (5)
26 Cultivate one small amount all the rest of my life (4,1,4)
27 Witch's cat, shape indeterminate, finding look-out room here? (5,4,5)

Down

1 The most frequent winner in first-past-the-post affairs (8,6)
2 Memory had Lupus in jungle losing its heart to him (7)
3 Not enough to overtake in the subway (9)
4 Refuse to include little person out of obstinacy (4-4)
5 One lot of drinks for all in the neighbourhood (6)
6 A bit of paint in gentle hue (5)
7 Prayer to make languages with no repeated letters (7)
8 A plot's innocent victim — it was Byzantine (14)
15 Roman god retaining incomplete system finds Dream lover (9)
16 Kelly's clown forbidding alteration of dial (8)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,370

18 Playgirl Lawrence left standing? (7)
20 Potter's place as true revolutionary getting the breeze up (7)
21 Gilbertian suicide taken to Italian mountain? (6)
23 Is 1 across a boy's name? (5)

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FinanceGuardian

Mail's cable TV dream dies

Chris Barrie, Media Business Correspondent

THE Daily Mail's ambitious plans to break out of newspapers and into multi-channel television stumbled yesterday when the company announced the closure of its Channel One cable television operation just 24 hours after the death of Lord Rothermere.

The closure will also send a shiver through the ranks of the television industry as it prepares for the launch of multi-channel services.

Channel One was conceived as a departure for British television, with video-journalists both filming and reporting, replacing traditional camera crews. The service was also supposed to tap in to demand for local news and information during an era when the number of TV channels was expanding rapidly.

But Peter Williams, finance director of the Daily Mail & General Trust, said Channel One's revenues had been far lower than planned. Subscriptions to cable services had not risen as fast as hoped, spelling lower than expected subscriptions and advertising revenue. He added: "The principal driver of revenue was not in our control."

With a 10-year contract to run the channel due to expire in 2002, it was becoming clear that the DMGT could no longer justify supporting its losses. Most of the 90 staff will be made redundant.



Mr Williams also indicated that the ruling by the Independent Television Commission outlawing most channel bundling agreements had not helped Channel One's case. It was broadcast exclusively on cable in London and Bristol, providing local news and information. The company had chosen to launch in London because managers thought the prospects for revenue were best there.

The channel also ran a joint venture in Liverpool with the newspaper company Trinity, which was said to be unaffected by the closure.

One senior TV executive said it was possible that Channel One's demise had been sealed with the death of Sir David English, editor in chief of Associated Newspapers. He was said to have been a great supporter of the channel.

But Mr Williams said the group had decided in June — before Sir David's death — that the problems at Channel One had to be addressed. The group had spent three months trying to find alternatives, and the decision to close it was taken three weeks ago.

Mr Williams stressed that the closure also had nothing to do with Lord Rothermere's death — the coincidence was a "great misfortune".

Although a formal statement from DMGT said the closure would have no material impact on its results for the year to September 27, 1998, it is understood that the group had invested up to £40 million in the venture over the years.

Nick Pollard, head of Sky News and head of programmes for Channel One from the launch in 1994 to 1996, said it had been "an idea five years ahead of its time".

He predicted that city television would be in great demand once multi-channel TV had taken hold.

Channel One had been a great training ground for other TV stations, he said.

Richard Horwood, managing director of the Mirror Group's television and telecoms division, Mirrortel, said his company had a much broader revenue base. Mirrortel had three times the revenue on much the same cost base, and broadcast only to cities where it had a strong base.

Channel One still holds rights to programming. Some of that footage may be used to support the Liverpool operation.

Notebook

Foreign winds still drive events



Edited by Mark Milner

HAS the UK suddenly become an island of stability in a sea of troubles? It would be tempting to see yesterday's fall in the pound against the German mark as a direct result of expectations that British interest rates have peaked — an expectation fuelled by the latest data from the service sector. After all, that would imply investors were looking at sterling purely in the light of domestic economic policy and felt able to ignore events elsewhere.

Certainly there will be some relief in Threadneedle Street and among British exporters to Europe that sterling is slipping down against the mark. But the fall owes at least as much to Wall Street as to domestic factors. Foreign investors have piled into US equities over the past 18 months to the tune of more than $100 billion. With US stock market indices now well below their summer peaks, many investors are either looking for or have found the exit.

Although some may be switching to the US bond market, many will be looking to sell not only shares but also the dollars resulting from share sales. As long as sentiment towards US equities is rocky, the dollar will be vulnerable. Despite the recent modest recovery in the yen, a large part of the proceeds of dollar-asset sales is likely to head towards the German mark. That will boost the mark not just against the dollar but also the pound.

While policy-makers may take a benign view of the pound's fall against the mark they might see its corresponding appreciation against the dollar as less than stable. Monetary policy will have to nod in the direction of events outside the UK for a while yet, whatever opponents of the single currency may argue.

Pump primers

IF OIL companies were at the helm, supertankers would take even longer to turn around. Admittedly, few would expect behemoths of the oil industry such as Shell, Exxon or BP to be fleet of foot. But the fact that the oil price is at its lowest level for 10 years is hardly unexpected. And the huge overcapacity in refineries has been looming for years, as has the forecourt competition now coming from big supermarket players such as Sainsbury, Tesco, Asda and Safeway.

Yesterday's decision by Shell and Texaco to merge their European oil refining and petrol station businesses is long overdue. BP and Mobil did something similar two years ago and have been throwing off savings which make the £120 million a year forecast by Shell and Texaco look wholly achievable.

Hard decisions will be needed, however. The merger will yield savings only if the two companies together are more determined than they have been separately about closing petrol stations and refineries.

When the oil price was high the majors were shielded against having to take tough decisions. Now the price has fallen and there is a competitive new kid on the block who is determined to deny the incumbents an inch of shelter.

The restructuring may be taking place slowly. But, once the tanker has turned, the turbulence could be as powerful as that resulting from the 1970s oil price shock.

Seoul searching

RESTRUCTURING plans by South Korea's *chaebol* should be greeted with cheers, shouldn't they? After all, it was the appetite for assets of these often family-controlled conglomerates, whatever the return, that did much to leave South Korea's economy at the mercy of the devastation that swept through Asia last year.

If yesterday's programme promised to produce a thorough-going restructuring of the *chaebol*, with unproductive assets shut or sold and companies slimming to core competencies, it would be welcome.

The proposals threaten to fall far short of that. The Federation of Korean Industries did promise an end to overlapping investment and the introduction of policies which would make better use of resources and help boost export prices. That would be a relief to semiconductor makers, which have been suffering from a slide in prices for memory chips that some have been quick to blame on the Koreans.

But the details of the scheme are far from clear. Take semiconductors. Hyundai and LG have agreed to merge their semiconductor businesses, which would give them a manufacturing capacity for Dram chips — the commodity end of the semiconductor market — close to that of the world's number one, Samsung. The two businesses are haggling, however, over details of the merger. Hyundai wants the lion's share of the merged business while LG is fighting for an even split. Little chance that the two will be able to strike the kind of accord that could make a meaningful difference to capacity and prices.

It is hard to push a people as proud as the Koreans in directions they do not want to go, especially ones with which their social structure is not best fitted to cope.

To solve its economic problems Korea needs western help well beyond the cash from the IMF. It needs access to western markets and consumers — access which could come under pressure if Korea is perceived to be doing little to put its industrial house in order.

Disco doldrums

Dance scene moves to the bars

Liz Stuart

IBIZA may still be buzzing but in the UK it could well be, as the new film says, The Last Days of Disco. Over the last three years, one in 10 nightclubs has closed.

In spite of the marketing muscle of superclubs like Cream and the Ministry of Sound, increasing competition from other leisure venues, such as bars which play club-type music, has hit smaller clubs hard, according to a report from research group Mintel.

Those still tripping the light fantastic are spending less per head — doubtless because so many clubbers take dance drugs such as Ecstasy rather than purchasing alcohol. Average per capita spend has fallen from £11.21 in 1997 to £10.83 last year.

"Having a late-night licence and not charging admission puts such outlets (music bars) in direct competition with clubs and discos. "In addition, clubs will face competition from within their own industry, as some of the major operators expand their estates by replacing older clubs with modern, larger capacity units," said Mintel leisure analyst Chris Butcher.



Clubbing together ... Wilt Stillman's movie, The Last Days of Disco, set in the early 1980s, focuses on the lives and loves of two unlikely flatmates

But other analysts are puzzled by the disco doldrums: "The rest of the leisure industry is booming and has yet to be impacted by the slowing in the economy," one said.

Consolidation of the market looks set to continue. In March European Leisure announced plans to close, convert or sell off 18 of its less profitable outlets and Granada Leisure is also gradually divesting itself of its nightclubs.

Although numbers of clubbers have declined by 1.3 million between 1997 and 1998, people who do go, go more often. The biggest group of regular clubbers is the 15-24 year group, half of whom say they are "frequent visitors". And single people are seven times more likely to go clubbing than married people.

"The whole industry is becoming increasingly reliant on this smaller group of people, which leaves it vulnerable. Only clubs which can tap into this and differentiate themselves from music bars will survive," said Mr Butcher.

The chart

Leading multiple outlet nightclub operators

		outlets	percentage market share by number of outlets
1	Northern Leisure	54	3.3
2	Rank Leisure	48	2.9
3	First Leisure	40	2.5
4	European Leisure	30	1.8
5	Allied Domecq	22	1.3

Source: Mintel to May 1998

Ministers pressed to reprieve Magnox plants

Nuclear power company seeks to protect reprocessing business by flaunting its green credentials. **David Gow** reports

BRITISH Nuclear Fuels, the state-owned reprocessing and waste management company, is pressing ministers to extend the lives of its eight ageing Magnox reactors in order to help the Government meet its targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

BNFL, which yesterday declared lower pre-tax profits of £199 million for last year along with an increased £53 million dividend for the Exchequer, said its merger with Magnox Electric meant it produces about 8 per cent of Britain's electricity — saving more than 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions in 1997-98.

"This is equivalent to taking all cars and taxis off the roads for one-and-a-half days a year or replacing on an annual basis 80 million kilometres of road usage," John Taylor, BNFL's chief executive, said.

On completing the Magnox Electric acquisition at the end of January, BNFL took on six more Magnox nuclear reactors on top of the two it already operated at Chapelcross in Scotland and Calder Hall, Cumbria, and was expected to begin decommissioning these from 2007.

But the company has seized on the international Kyoto agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions and the Commons trade and industry select committee's report which amounts to an affirmation of a future for the nuclear industry to argue that their lives should be extended beyond the average 37 years.

"The Government will have great difficulty in meeting these self-imposed targets and if we said we would close the Magnox stations I don't think we would get a welcome from ministers because the targets would go out of the window," said John Guinness, retiring chairman.

According to Messrs Guinness and Taylor, the lives could be extended by up to five years or even longer if the Government and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate agreed.

Mr Guinness said: "We are only going to extend the lives if it is safe and makes economic sense."

Magnox was BNFL's biggest customer for reprocessing spent fuel and prolonging the reactors' lives would help that part of the business to operate profitably while reducing the costs of discharging associated nuclear clean-up liabilities.

But further job losses among the combined 16,000 workforce could occur as BNFL extends its voluntary severance scheme and takes further measures to reduce the cost of producing electricity to 1.8p per kilowatt hour. It already has a four-year programme to cut costs by 25 per cent by 2001 and saved £57 million (7 per cent) last year.

Mr Taylor wants the company to become "a global leader in the nuclear services business" following its joint £720 million acquisition with US partner Morrison Knudsen of Westinghouse's nuclear business in the US and expects overseas activities to provide about a half of the overall £2 billion-a-year turnover.

But he and Mr Guinness dismissed ideas that BNFL would eventually pull out of Britain.

Environmentalists had hailed the recent ministerial agreement in Sintra, Portugal, to cut radioactive discharges to the sea to "close to zero" as effectively signalling the closure of the Sellafield reprocessing site.

"We don't see this as the death-knell of Sellafield," Mr Taylor said. Discharges had been reduced tenfold between 1990 and 1997, and could be eliminated in less than 20 years.

However, BNFL, which admitted that "minor" radiological and environmental incidents had grown last year, was this week fined £20,000 by magistrates for exceeding pollution limits at its Springfields site.

BT takes fast lane to put Internet in every home

Chris Barrie, Media Business Correspondent

BRITISH Telecom yesterday fired the opening shots of its long-awaited campaign to bring high-speed access to the Internet within reach of the public and small business.

In an attempt to wrest back ground lost to the cable companies, BT is to sell a mass market digital communications link aimed at enabling householders to surf the Net at faster speeds.

The link may also be used to work in conjunction with multi-media applications, including digital television services such as interactive shopping or video phone calls.

Afshin Mohebbi, managing director of BT's business division, said its new service offered flexibility, simplicity and speed. It was a significant step towards the "mass digitalisation" of British homes.

BT estimates that that the growth in Internet usage will be huge, and that by 2002 its wires will carry more data than voice traffic, compared with a 10-90 split today.

Mr Mohebbi said 6 million homes had a personal computer, about 27 per cent of the total. BT's target was to sell its new service, called Highway, to all Britain's 23 million households within five years.

BT will charge customers £116 to convert their existing line to the new facility, plus monthly rental of £40 as well as call charges. Mr Mohebbi denied suggestions that the charges were too high to convert British homes in the face of falling telecoms prices charged by rival cable and mobile companies.

BT Highway uses the existing copper connection to the home, but new technology in the exchange and wall-mounted socket allows the line to carry both analogue and digital signals.

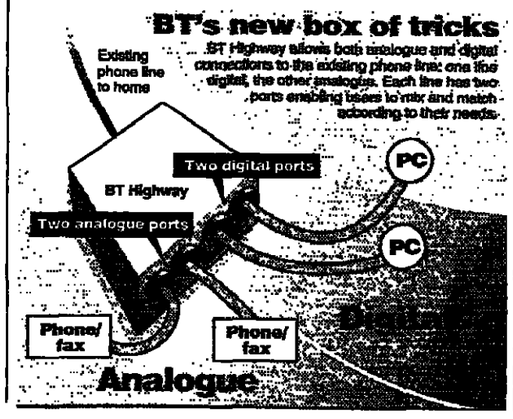
The result is a four-socket box in the home, with two sockets for digital use and two for analogue. The analogue sockets are used for phones and fax machines, while the digital connections hook PCs on to the Net.

No more than two of these sockets can be used at any one time. But householders are otherwise free to mix and match their usage as they wish, running a phone and PC on-line simultaneously, or two PCs, or phone and fax.

Alternatively one PC can be used on-line alone, in which case it will transmit and receive data at 128 kilobits a second, three times the conventional speed.

BT executives hope companies will now develop applications which will exploit the new technology, including connections to digital TVs and more sophisticated video conferencing.

Although expensive, BT Highway will operate at faster speeds. Connection to the Net could typically take five seconds instead of up to 30 seconds with an analogue link.



BA plans airport Eurostar link

Keith Harper Transport Editor

BRITISH Airways plans to link Heathrow and Gatwick by Eurostar services as part of a long-term aim to replace short-haul air journeys with rail. BA's chief executive, Bob Ayling, said yesterday.

BA and National Express are due to take over the running of Eurostar's services between London and Paris at the beginning of next month, and Mr Ayling said there was no reason why the service should not expand.

He said that an engineering investigation showed that it was possible to link Britain's two largest airports by rail. The track existed, although it would have to be upgraded, but it is not likely to happen until a decision has been taken to build Terminal 5 at Heathrow.

Mr Ayling revealed BA's plans for the expansion of Eurostar during a visit to Denver in the United States.

He said that BA and National Express had stepped in to rescue a "bankrupt business" because they thought it had a bright future, but added that there would have to be radical changes. Each Eurostar train has the potential to carry 770 passengers, the equivalent of two and a half times the load of a jumbo jet.

Mr Ayling said Eurostar was a good product and had taken 70 per cent of the market between London, Brussels and Paris, "but we intend to make it even better".

The brand image will be unaltered, but Mr Ayling promised improvements in catering, the style and quality of service and handling techniques at Brussels and Paris.

He said BA's worldwide reservations system would have a considerable impact on bookings, which Eurostar at present could not match. BA's computer system enabled the company to keep an inventory to assess demand for a year ahead, he said.

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